JULY, 1911

THE CAVALIER

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THE CAVALIER

The Second Deluge

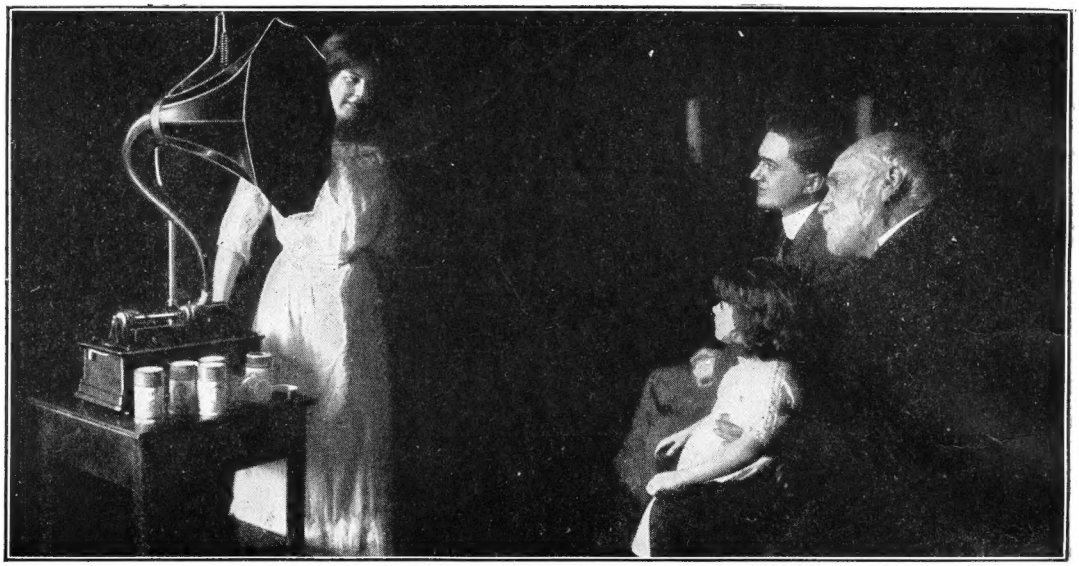
by

Garrett P. Servis

PRICE 10 CENTS

JULY

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY
NEW YORK & LONDON



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AGENTS make big money selling our new gold letters for office windows, store fronts, and glass signs. Any one can put them on. Write today for free sample and full particulars. METALLIC SIGN LETTER Co., 413 N. Clark St., Chicago.

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THE CAVALIER

Vol. IX. JULY, 1911. No. 2.

WHAT is here set down is the fruit of long and careful research among disjointed records left by survivors of the terrible events described. The writer wishes frankly to say that, in some instances, he has followed the course which all historians are compelled to take by using his imagination to round out the picture. But he is able conscientiously to declare that in the substance of his narrative, as well as in every detail which is specifically described, he has followed faithfully the accounts of eye-witnesses, or of those who were in a position to know the truth of what they related.

CHAPTER I.

COSMO VEPSÁL.

AN undersized, lean, wizen-faced man, with an immense bald head, as round and smooth and shining as a giant soap-bubble, and a pair of beady black eyes, set close together, so that he resembled a gnome of amazing brain capacity and prodigious power of concentration, sat bent over a writing desk with a huge sheet of cardboard before him, on which he was swiftly drawing geometrical and trigonometrical figures. Compasses, T-squares, rulers, protectors, and ellipsographs obeyed the touch of his fingers as if inspired with life.

The room around him was a jungle of terrestrial and celestial globes, chemists' retorts, tubes, pipes, and all the indescribable apparatus that modern science has invented, and which, to the uninitiated, seems as incomprehensible as the ancient paraphernalia of alchemists and astrologers. The walls were lined with book shelves, and adorned along the upper portions with the most extraordinary photographs and drawings. Even the ceiling was covered

with charts, some representing the sky, while many others were geological and topographical pictures of the face of the earth.

Beside the drawing-board lay a pad of paper, and occasionally the little man nervously turned to this, and, grasping a long pencil, made elaborate calculations, covering the paper with a sprinkling of mathematical symbols that looked like magnified animalcula. While he worked, under a high light from a single window placed well up near the ceiling, his forehead contracted into a hundred wrinkles, his cheeks became feverous, his piercing eyes glowed with inner fire, and drops of perspiration ran down in front of his ears. One would have thought that he was laboring to save his very soul and had but a few seconds of respite left.

Presently he threw down the pencil, and with astonishing agility let himself rapidly, but carefully, off the stool on which he had been sitting, keeping the palms of his hands on the seat beside his hips until he felt his feet touch the floor. Then he darted at a book-shelf, pulled down a ponderous tome, flapped it open in a clear space on the floor, and dropped on his knees to consult it.

After turning a leaf or two he found what he was after, read down the page, keeping a finger on the lines, and, having finished his reading, jumped to his feet and hurried back to the stool, on which he mounted so quickly that it was impossible to see how he managed it without an upset. Instantly he made a new diagram, and then fell to figuring furiously on the pad, making his pencil gyrate so fast that its upper end vibrated like the wing of a dragon-fly.

At last he threw down the pencil, and, encircling his knees with his clasped arms, sank in a heap on the stool. The lids dropped over his shining eyes, and he became buried in thought.

When he reopened his eyes and unbent his brows, his gaze happened to be directed toward a row of curious big photographs which ran like a pictured frieze round the upper side of the wall of the room. A casual observer might have thought that the little man had been amusing himself by photographing the explosions of fireworks on a Fourth of July night; but it was evident by his expression that these singular pictures had no connection with civic pyrotechnics, but must represent something of a most pronounced fatal and stupendous import.

The little man's face took on a rapt look, in which wonder and fear seemed to be blended. With a sweep of his hand he included the whole series of photographs in a comprehensive glance, and then, settling his gaze upon a particularly bizarre object in the center, he began to speak aloud, although there was nobody to listen to him.

"My God!" he said. "That's it! That Lick photograph of the Lord Rosse Nebula is its very image, except that there's no electric fire in it. The same great whirl of outer spirals, and then comes the awful central mass—and we're going to plunge straight into it. Then quintrillions of tons of water will condense on the earth and cover it like a universal cloudburst. And then good-by to the human race—unless—unless—I, Cosmo Versál, inspired by science, can save a remnant to repeople the planet after the catastrophe."

Again, for a moment, he closed his eyes, and puckered his hemispherical brow, while, with drawn-up knees, he seemed perilously balanced on the high stool. Several times he slowly shook his head, and when his eyes reopened their fire was gone, and a reflective film covered them. He began to speak, more deliberately than before, and in a musing tone:

"What can I do? I don't believe there is a mountain on the face of the globe lofty enough to lift its head above that flood. Hum, hum! It's no use thinking about mountains! The flood will be six miles deep—six miles from the present sea-level; my last calculation proves it beyond all question. And that's only a minimum—it may be miles deeper, for no mortal man can tell exactly what'll happen when the earth plunges into a nebula like that.

"We'll have to float; that's the thing. I'll have to build an ark. I'll be a second Noah. I'll advise the whole world to build arks.

"Millions might save themselves that way, for the flood is not going to last forever. We'll get through the nebula in a few months, and then the waters will gradually recede, and the high lands will emerge again. But it'll be an awful long time, though; I doubt if the earth will ever be just as it was before. There won't be much room, except for fish—but there won't be many inhabitants for what dry land there is."

Once more he fell into silent meditation, and while he mused there came a knock at the door. The little man started up on his seat, alert as a squirrel, and turned his eyes over his shoulder, listening intently. The knock was repeated — three quick sharp raps. Evidently he at once recognized them.

"All right," he called out, and, letting himself down, ran swiftly to the door and opened it.

A tall, thin man, with bushy black hair, heavy eyebrows, a high, narrow forehead, and a wide, clean shaven mouth, wearing a solemn kind of smile, entered and grasped the little man by both hands.

"Cosmo," he said, without wasting any time on preliminaries, "have you worked it out?"

"I have just finished."

"And you find the worst?"

"Yes, worse than I ever dreamed it would be. The waters will be six miles deep."

"Phew!" exclaimed the other, his smile fading. "That is indeed serious. And when does it begin?"

"Inside of a year. We're within three hundred million miles of the watery nebula now and you know that the earth travels more than that distance in twelve months."

"Have you seen it?"

"How could I see it—haven't I told you it is invisible? If it could be seen all these stupid astronomers would have spotted it long ago. But I'll tell you what I have seen."

Cosmo Versál's voice sank into a whisper, and he shuddered slightly as he went on:

"Only last night I was sweeping the sky with the telescope when I noticed, in Hercules and Lyra, and all that part of the heavens, a dimming of some of the fainter stars. It was like the shadow of the shroud of a ghost. Nobody else would have noticed it, and I wouldn't if I had not been looking for it. It's knowledge that clarifies the eyes and breeds knowledge, Joseph Smith. It was not truly visible, and yet I could see that it was there. I tried to make out the shape of the thing—but it was too indefinite. But I know very well what it is. See here"—he suddenly broke off — "Look at that photograph." (He was pointing at the Lord Rosse Nebula on the wall). "It's like that, only it's coming edgewise toward us. We may miss some of the outer spirals, but we're going to smash into the center."

With fallen jaw, and black brows contracted, Joseph Smith stared at the photograph.

"It doesn't shine like that," he said at last.

The little man snorted contemptuously.

"What have I told you about its invisibility?" he demanded.

"But how, then, do you know that it is of a watery nature?"

Cosmo Versál threw up his hands and waved them in an agony of impatience. He climbed upon his stool to get nearer the level of the other's eyes, and fixing him with his gaze, exclaimed:

"You know very well how I know it. I know it because I have demonstrated with my new spectroscope, which analyses extra-visual rays, that all those dark nebulæ that were photographed in the milky way years ago are composed of watery vapor. They are far off, on the limits of the universe. This one is one right at hand, It's a little one compared with them—but it's enough, yes, it's enough! You know that more than two years ago I began to correspond with astronomers all over the world about this thing, and not one of them would listen to me. Well, they'll listen when it's too late perhaps.

"They'll listen when the flood-gates are opened and the inundation begins. It's not the first time that this thing has happened. I haven't a doubt that the flood of Noah, that everybody pretends to laugh at now, was caused by the earth passing through a watery nebula. But this will be worse than that; there weren't two thousand million people to be drowned then as there are now."

For five minutes neither spoke. Cosmo Versál swung on the stool, and played with an ellipsograph; Joseph Smith dropped his chin on his breast and nervously fingered the pockets of his long vest. At last he raised his head and asked, in a low voice:

"What are you going to do, Cosmo?"

"I'm going to get ready," was the short reply.

"How?"

"Build an ark."

"But will you give no warning to others?"

"I'll do my best. I'll telephone to all the officials, scientific and otherwise, in America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and Aus-

tralia. I'll write in every language to all the newspapers and magazines. I'll send out circulars. I'll counsel everybody to drop every other occupation and begin to build arks — but nobody will heed me. You'll see. My ark will be the only one, but I'll save as many in it as I can. And I depend upon you, Joseph, to help me. From all appearances, it's the only chance that the human race has of survival.

"If I hadn't made this discovery they would all have been wiped out like miners in a flooded pit. We may persuade a few to be saved—but what an awful thing it is that when the truth is thrust into their very faces people won't believe, won't listen, won't see, won't be helped, but will die like dogs in their obstinate ignorance and blindness."

"But they will, they must, listen to you," said Joseph Smith eagerly.

"They *won't*, but I must *make* them," replied Cosmo Versál. "Anyhow, I must make a few of the best of them hear me. The fate of a whole race is at stake. If we can save a handful of the best blood and brain of mankind, the world will have a new chance, and perhaps a better and higher race will be the result. Since I can't save them all, I'll pick and choose. I'll have the flower of humanity in my ark. I'll at least snatch that much from the jaws of destruction."

The little man was growing very earnest and his eyes were aglow with the fire of enthusiastic purpose. As he dropped his head on one side, it looked too heavy for the stemlike neck, but it conveyed an impression of immense intellectual power. Its imposing contour lent force to his words.

"The flower of humanity," he continued after a slight pause. "Who composes it? I must decide that question. Is it the billionaires? Is it the kings and rulers? Is it the men of science? Is it the society leaders? Bah! I'll have to think on that. I can't take them all, but I'll give them *all* a chance to *save themselves*—though I know they won't act on the advice."

Here he paused.

"Won't the existing ships do—especially if more are built?" Joseph Smith suddenly asked, interrupting Cosmo's train of thought.

"Not at all," was the reply. "They're not suited to the kind of navigation that will be demanded. They're not buoyant enough, nor manageable enough, and they haven't enough carrying capacity for power and provisions. They'll be swamped at the wharves, or if they should get away they'd be sent to the bottom inside a few hours. Nothing but specially constructed arks will serve. And *there's* more trouble for me—I must devise a new form of vessel. Heavens, how short the time is! Why couldn't I have found this out ten years ago? It's only to-day that I have myself learned the full truth, though I have worked on it so long."

"How many will you be able to carry in your ark?" asked Smith.

"I can't tell yet. That's another question to be carefully considered. I shall build the vessel of this new metal, levium, half as heavy as aluminum and twice as strong as steel. I ought to find room without the slightest difficulty for a round thousand in it."

"Surely many more than that!" exclaimed Joseph Smith. "Why, there are ocean-liners that carry several times as many."

"You forget," replied Cosmo Versál, "that we must have provisions enough to last for a long time, because we cannot count on the immediate reemergence of any land, even the most mountainous, and the most compressed food takes space when a great quantity is needed. It won't do to overcrowd the vessel, and invite sickness. Then, too, I must take many animals along."

"Animals," returned Smith. "I hadn't thought of that. But is it necessary?"

"Absolutely. Would you have less foresight than Noah? I shall not imitate him by taking male and female of every species, but I must at least provide for restocking such land as eventually appears above the waters with the animals most useful to man. Then, too, animals are essential to the life of the earth. Any agricultural chemist would tell you that. They play an indispensable part in the vital cycle of the soil. I must also take certain species of insects and birds. I'll telephone Professor Hergeschmitberger at Berlin to learn precisely what are the capitally important species of the animal kingdom."

"And when will you begin the construction of the ark?"

"Instantly. There's not a moment to lose. And it's equally important to send out warnings broadcast immediately. There you can

help me. You know what I want to say. Write it out at once; put it as strong as you can; send it everywhere; put it in the shape of posters; hurry it to the newspaper offices. Telephone, in my name, to the Carnegie Institution, to the Smithsonian Institution, to the Royal Society, to the French, Russian, Italian, German, and all the other Academies and Associations of Science to be found anywhere on earth.

"Don't neglect the slightest means of publicity. Thank Heaven, the money to pay for all this is not lacking. If my good father, when he piled up his fortune from the profits of the original Transcontinental Aerian Company, could have foreseen the use to which his son would put it for the benefit—what do I say, for the benefit? nay, for the *salvation* — of mankind, he would have rejoiced in his work."

"Ah, that reminds me," exclaimed Joseph Smith. "I was about to ask, a few minutes ago, why air-ships would not do for this business. Couldn't people save themselves from the flood by taking refuge in the atmosphere?"

Cosmo Versál looked at his questioner with an ironical smile.

"Do you know," he asked, "how long a dirigible can be kept afloat? Do you know for how long a voyage the best aeroplane types can be provisioned with power? There's not an air-ship of any kind that can go more than two weeks at the very uttermost without touching solid earth, and then it must be mighty sparing of its power. If we can save mankind now, and give it another chance, perhaps the time will come when power can be drawn out of the ether of space, and men can float in the air as long as they choose.

"But as things are now, we must go back to Noah's plan, and trust to the buoyant power of water. I fully expect that when the deluge begins people will flock to the highlands and the mountains in air-ships—but alas! that won't save them. Remember what I have told you—this flood is going to be six miles deep!"

The second morning after the conversation between Cosmos Versál and Joseph Smith, New York was startled by seeing, in huge red letters, on every blank wall, on the bare flanks of towering sky-scrapers, on the lofty stations of aeroplane lines, on billboards, fences, advertising-boards along suburban roads, in the Subway stations, and fluttering from strings of kites over the city, the following announcement:

THE WORLD IS TO BE DROWNED!

Save Yourselves While It Is Yet Time!
Drop Your Business: It Is of No Consequence!
Build Arks: It Is Your Only Salvation!
The Earth Is Going To Plunge into a Watery Nebula: There Is No Escape!
Hundreds of Millions Will Be Drowned: You Have Only a Few Months To Get Ready!
For Particulars Address: Cosmo Versál, 3000 Fifth Avenue.

CHAPTER II.

MOCKING AT FATE.

WHEN New York recovered from its first astonishment over the extraordinary posters, it indulged in a loud laugh. Everybody knew who Cosmo Versál was. His eccentricities had filled many readable columns in the newspapers. Yet there was a certain respect for him, too. This was due to his extraordinary intellectual ability and unquestionable scientific knowledge. But his imagination was as free as the winds, and it often led him upon excursions in which nobody could follow him, and which caused the more steady-going scientific brethren to shake their heads. They called him able but flighty. The public at times called him brilliant and amusing.

His father, who had sprung from some unknown source in southeastern Europe, and, beginning as a newsboy in New York, had made his way to the front in the financial world, had left his entire fortune to Cosmo. The latter had no taste for finance or business, but a devouring appetite for science, to which, in his own way, he devoted all his powers, all his time, and all his money. He never married, was never seen in society, and had very few intimates —but he was known by sight, or reputation, to everybody. There was not a scientific body or association of any consequence in the world of which he was not a member. Those which looked askance at his bizarre ideas were glad to accept pecuniary aid from him.

The notion that the world was to be drowned had taken possession of him about three years before the opening scene of this narrative. To work out the idea, he built an observatory, set up a laboratory, invent-

ed instruments, including his strange spectroscope (which was scoffed at by the scientific world).

Finally, submitting the results of his observations to mathematical treatment, proved, to his own satisfaction, the absolute correctness of his thesis that the well-known "proper motion of the solar system" was about to result in an encounter between the earth and an invisible watery nebula, which would have the effect of inundating the globe. As this startling idea gradually took shape, he communicated it to scientific men in all lands, but failed to find a single disciple, except his friend Joseph Smith, who, without being able to follow all his reasonings, accepted on trust the conclusions of Cosmo's more powerful mind. Accordingly, at the end of his investigation, he enlisted Smith as secretary, propagandist, and publicity agent.

New York laughed a whole day and night at the warning red letters. They were the talk of the town. People joked about them in cafés, clubs, at home, in the streets, in the offices, in the exchanges, in the street-cars, on the Elevated, in the Subways. Crowds gathered on corners to watch the flapping posters aloft on the kite lines. The afternoon newspapers issued specials which were all about the coming flood, and everywhere one heard the cry of the newsboys: "*Extra-a-a! Drowning of a Thouand Million People! Cosmo Versál predicts the End of the World!*" On their editorial pages the papers were careful to discount the scare lines, and terrific pictures, that covered the front sheets, with humorous jibes at the author of the formidable prediction.

The Owl, which was the only paper that put the news in half a column of ordinary type, took a judicial attitude, called upon the city authorities to tear down the posters, and hinted that "this absurd person, Cosmo Versál, who disgraces a once honored name with his childish attempt to create a sensation that may cause untold harm among the ignorant masses," had laid himself open to criminal prosecution.

In their latest editions, several of the papers printed an interview with Cosmo Versál, in which he gave figures and calculations that, on their face, seemed to offer mathematical proof of the correctness of his forecast. In impassioned language, he implored the public to believe that he would not mislead them, spoke of the instant necessity of constructing arks of safety, and averred that the presence of the terrible nebula that was so soon to drown the world was already manifest in the heavens.

Some readers of these confident statements began to waver, especially when confronted with mathematics which they could not understand. But still, in general, the laugh went on. It broke into boisterousness in one of the largest theaters where a bright-witted "artist," who always made a point of hitting off the very latest sensation, got himself up in a lifelike imitation of the well-known figure of Cosmo Versál, topped with a bald head as big as a bushel, and sailed away into the flies with a pretty member of the ballet, whom he had gallantly snatched from a tumbling ocean of green baize, singing at the top of his voice until they disappeared behind the proscenium arch:

"Oh, th' Nebula is coming
To drown the wicked earth,
With all his spirals humming
'S he waltzes in his mirth.

Chorus.
"Don't hesitate a second,
Get ready to embark,
And skip away to safety
With Cosmo and his ark.

"Th' Nebula's a direful bird
'S he skims the ether blue!
He's angry over what he's heard,
'N's got his eye on you.

Chorus.
"Don't hesitate a second, etc.

"When Nebulas begin to pipe
The bloomin' O. H. 2
Y'bet yer life the time is ripe
To think what you will do.

Chorus.
"Don't hesitate a second, etc.

"He'll tip th' Atlantic o'er its brim,
And swamp the mountains tall;
He'll let the broad Pacific in,
And leave no land at all.

Chorus.
"Don't hesitate a second, etc.

"He's got an option on the spheres;
He's leased the milky way;
He's caught the planets in arrears,
'N's bound to make 'em pay.

Chorus.
"Don't hesitate a second, etc."

The roars of laughter and applause with which this effusion of vaudeville genius was

greeted, showed the cheerful spirit in which the public took the affair. No harm seemed to have come to the "ignorant masses" yet.

But the next morning there was a suspicious change in the popular mind. People were surprised to see new posters in place of the old ones, more lurid in letters and language than the original. The morning papers had columns of description and comment, and some of them seemed disposed to treat the prophet and his prediction with a certain degree of seriousness.

The savants who had been interviewed overnight, did not talk very convincingly, and made the mistake of flinging contempt on both Cosmo and "the gullible public."

Naturally, the public wouldn't stand for that, and the pendulum of opinion began to swing the other way. Cosmo helped his cause by sending to every newspaper a carefully prepared statement of his observations and calculations, in which he spoke with such force of conviction that few could read his words without feeling a thrill of apprehensive uncertainty. This was strengthened by published despatches which showed that he had forwarded his warnings to all the well-known scientific bodies of the world, which, while decrying them, made no effective response.

And there was a note of positive alarm in a doubled-leaded bulletin from the new observatory at Mount McKinley, which affirmed that during the preceding night *a singular obscurity* had been suspected in the northern sky, seeming to veil many stars below the twelfth magnitude. It was added that the phenomenon was unprecedented, but that the observation was both difficult and uncertain.

Nowhere was the atmosphere of doubt and mystery, which now began to hang over the public, so remarkable as in Wall Street. The sensitive currents there responded like electric waves to the new influence, and, to the dismay of hard-headed observers, the market dropped as if it had been hit with a sledge-hammer. Stocks went down five, ten, in some cases twenty points in as many minutes.

The speculative issues slid down like wheat into a bin when the chutes are opened. Nobody could trace the exact origin of the movement, but selling-orders came tumbling in until there was a veritable panic.

From London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, St. Petersburg, flashed despatches announcing that the same unreasonable slump had manifested itself there, and all united in holding Cosmo Versál solely responsible for the foolish break in prices. Leaders of finance rushed to the exchanges trying by arguments and expostulations to arrest the downfall, but in vain.

In the afternoon, however, reason partially resumed its sway; then a quick recovery was felt, and many who had rushed to sell all they had, found cause to regret their precipitancy. The next day all was on the mend, as far as the stock market was concerned, but among the people at large the poison of awakened credulity continued to spread, nourished by fresh announcements from the fountain head.

Cosmo issued another statement to the effect that he had perfected plans for an ark of safety, which he would begin at once to construct in the neighborhood of New York, and he not only offered freely to give his plans to any who wished to commence construction on their own account, but he urged them, in the name of Heaven, to lose no time. This produced a prodigious effect, and multitudes began to be infected with a nameless fear.

Meanwhile an extraordinary scene occurred, behind closed doors, at the headquarters of the Carnegie Institution in Washington. Joseph Smith, acting under Cosmo Versál's direction, had forwarded an elaborate *précis* of the latter's argument, accompanied with full mathematical details, to the head of the institution. The character of this document was such that it could not be ignored. Moreover, the savants composing the council of the most important scientific association in the world were aware of the state of the public mind, and felt that it was incumbent upon them to do something to allay the alarm. Of late years a sort of supervisory control over scientific news of all kinds had been accorded to them, and they appreciated the fact that a duty now rested upon their shoulders.

Accordingly, a special meeting was called to consider the communication from Cosmo Versál. It was the general belief that a little critical examination would result in complete proof of the fallacy of all his work, proof which could be put in a form that the most uninstructed would understand.

But the papers, diagrams, and mathematical formulæ had no sooner been spread upon the table under the knowing eyes of the learned members of the council, than a chill of conscious impuissance ran through them.

They saw that Cosmo's mathematics were unimpeachable. His formulæ were accurately deduced, and his operations absolutely correct.

They could do nothing but attack his fundamental data, based on the alleged revelations of his new form of spectroscope, and on telescopic observations which were described in so much detail that the only way to combat them was by the general assertion that they were illusory. This was felt to be a very unsatisfactory method of procedure, as far as the public was concerned, because it amounted to no more than attacking the credibility of a witness who pretended to describe only what he himself had seen—and there is nothing so hard as to prove a negative.

Then, Cosmo had on his side the whole force of that curious tendency of the human mind which habitually gravitates toward whatever is extraordinary, revolutionary, and mysterious.

But a yet greater difficulty arose. Mention has been made of the strange bulletin from the Mount McKinley observatory. That had been incautiously sent out to the public by a thoughtless observer, who was more intent upon describing a singular phenomenon than upon considering its possible effect on the popular imagination. He had immediately received an expostulatory despatch from headquarters which henceforth shut his mouth—but he had told the simple truth, and how embarrassing that was became evident when, on the very table around which the savants were now assembled, three despatches were laid in quick succession from the great observatories of Mount Hekla, Iceland, the North Cape, and Kamchatka, all corroborating the statement of the Mount McKinley observer, that an inexplicable veiling of faint stars had manifested itself in the boreal quarter of the sky.

When the president read these despatches —which the senders had taken the precaution to mark "confidential"—the members of the council looked at one another with no little dismay. Here was the most unprejudiced corroboration of Cosmo Versál's assertion that the great nebula was already within the range of observation. How could they dispute such testimony, and what were they to make of it?

Two or three of the members began to be shaken in their convictions.

"Upon my word," exclaimed Professor Alexander Jones, "but this is very curious! And suppose the fellow should be right, after all?"

"Right!" cried the president, Professor Pludder, disdainfully. "Who ever heard of a watery nebula? The thing's absurd!"

"I don't see that it's absurd," replied Prof. Jones. "There's plenty of proof of the existence of hydrogen in some of the nebulæ."

"So there is," chimed in Prof. Abel Able, "and if there's hydrogen there may be oxygen, and there you have all that's necessary. It's not the idea that a nebula may consist of watery vapor that's absurd, but it is that a watery nebula, large enough to drown the earth by condensation upon it could have approached so near as this one must now be without sooner betraying its presence."

"How so?" demanded a voice.

"By its attraction. Cosmo Versál says it is already less than three hundred million miles away. If it is massive enough to drown the earth, it ought long ago to have been discovered by its disturbance of the planetary orbits."

"Not at all," exclaimed Professor Jeremiah Moses. "If you stick to that argument you'll be drowned sure. Just look at these facts. The earth weighs six and a half sextillions of tons, and the ocean one and a half quintillions. The average depth of the oceans is two and one-fifth miles. Now —if the level of the oceans were raised only about 1,600 feet, practically all the inhabited parts of the world would be flooded. To cause that increase in the level of the oceans only about one-eighth part would have to be added to their total mass, or, say, one-seventh part, allowing for the greater surface to be covered. That would be one thirty-thousandth of the weight of the globe, and if you suppose that only one-hundredth of the entire nebula were condensed on the earth, the whole mass of the nebula would not need to exceed one three-hundredth of the weight of the earth, or a quarter that of the moon — and nobody here will be bold enough to say that the approach of a mass no greater than that would be likely to be discovered through its attraction when it was three hundred million miles away."

Several of the astronomers present shook their heads at this, and Professor Pludder irritably declared that it was absurd.

"The attraction would be noticeable when it was a thousand millions of miles away," he continued.

"Yes, 'noticeable' I admit," replied Professor Moses, "but all the same you wouldn't notice it, because you wouldn't be looking for it unless the nebula were visible first, and even then it would require months of observation to detect the effects. And how are you going to get around those bulletins? The thing is beginning to be visible now, and I'll bet that if, from this time on, you study carefully the planetary motions, you will find evidence of the disturbance becoming stronger and stronger. Versál has pointed out that very thing, and calculated the perturbations. This thing has come like a thief in the night."

"You'd better hurry up and secure a place in the ark," said Professor Pludder sarcastically.

"I don't know but I shall, if I can get one," returned Professor Moses. "You may not think this is such a laughing matter a few months hence."

"I'm surprised," pursued the president, "that a man of your scientific standing should stultify himself by taking seriously such balderdash as this. I tell you the thing is absurd."

"And I tell you, *you* are absurd to say so!" retorted Professor Moses, losing his temper. "You've got four of the biggest telescopes in the world under your control; why don't you order your observers to look for this thing?"

Professor Pludder, who was a very big man, reared up his rotund form, and, bringing his fist down upon the table with a resounding whack, exclaimed:

"I'll do nothing so ridiculous! These bulletins have undoubtedly been influenced by the popular excitement. There has possibly been a little obscurity in the atmosphere—cirrus clouds, or something—and the observers have imagined the rest. I'm not going to insult science by encouraging the proceedings of a mountebank like Cosmo Versál. What we've got to do is to prepare a despatch for the press reassuring the populace and throwing the weight of this institution on the side of common sense and public tranquillity. Let the secretary indite such a despatch, and then we'll edit it and send it out."

Professor Pludder, naturally dictatorial, was sometimes a little overbearing, but being a man of great ability, and universally respected for his high rank in the scientific world, his colleagues usually bowed to his decisions. On this occasion his force of character sufficed to silence the doubters, and when the statement intended for the press had received its final touches it contained no hint of the seeds of discord that Cosmo Versál had sown among America's foremost savants. The next morning it appeared in all the newspapers as follows:

Official Statement from the Carnegie Institution.

In consequence of the popular excitement caused by the sensational utterances of a notorious pretender to scientific knowledge in New York, the council of this institution authorizes the statement that it has examined the alleged grounds on which the prediction of a great flood, to be caused by a nebula encountering the earth, is based, and finds, as all real men of science knew beforehand, that the entire matter is simply a canard.

The nebulæ are not composed of water; if they were composed of water they could not cause a flood on the earth; the report that some strange, misty object is visible in the starry heavens is based on a misapprehension; and finally, the so-called calculations of the author of this inexcusable hoax are baseless and totally devoid of scientific validity.

The public is earnestly advised to pay no further attention to the matter. If there were any danger to the earth—and such a thing is not to be seriously considered—astronomers would know it long in advance, and would give due and official warning.

Unfortunately for the popular effect of this pronouncement, on the very morning when it appeared in print, thirty thousand people were crowded around the old aviation field at Mineola, excitedly watching Cosmo Versál, with five hundred workmen, laying the foundations of a huge platform, while about the field were stretched sheets of canvas displaying the words:

THE ARK OF SAFETY.

Earnest Inspection Invited by All.

Attendants will Furnish Gratis Plans for Similar Constructions.

Small Arks Can Be Built for Families.

Act While There Is Yet Time.

The multitude saw at a glance that here was a work that would cost millions, and the spectacle of this immense expenditure, the evidence that Cosmo was backing his words with his money, furnished a silent argument which was irresistible. In the midst of all, flying about among his men, was Cosmo, impressing every beholder with the feeling that intellect was in charge.

Like the gray coat of Napoleon on a battle-field, the sign of that mighty brow bred confidence.

CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST DROPS OF THE DELUGE.

THE utterance of the Carnegie Institution indeed fell flat, and Cosmo Versál's star reigned in the ascendent. He pushed his preparations with amazing speed, and not only politics, but even the war that had just broken out in South America was swallowed up in the newspapers by endless descriptions of the mysterious proceedings at Mineola. Cosmo still found time every day to write articles and to give out interviews; and Joseph Smith was kept constantly on the jump, running for street-cars or trains, or leaping, with his long coat flapping, into and out of elevators on ceaseless missions to the papers, the scientific societies, and the meetings of learned or unlearned bodies which had been persuaded to investigate the subject of the coming flood. Between the work of preparation and that of proselytism it is difficult to see how Cosmo found sleep.

Day by day the Ark of Safety rose higher upon its great platform, its huge metallic ribs and broad, bulging sides glinting strangely in the unbroken sunshine—for, as if imitating the ominous quiet before an earthquake, the July sky had stripped itself of all clouds. No thunder-storms broke the serenity of the long days, and never had the overarching heavens seemed so spotless and motionless in their cerulean depths.

All over the world, as the news despatches showed, the same strange calm prevailed. Cosmo did not fail to call attention to this unparalleled repose of nature as a sure prognostic of the awful event in preparation.

The heat became tremendous. Hundreds were stricken down in the blazing streets. Multitudes fled to the seashore, and lay panting under umbrellas on the burning sands, or vainly sought relief by plunging into the heated water, which, rolling lazily in with the tide, felt as if it had come from over a boiler.

Still, perspiring crowds constantly watched the workmen, who struggled with the overpowering heat, although Cosmo had erected canvas screens for them and installed a hundred immense electric fans to create a breeze.

Beginning with five hundred men, he had, in less than a month, increased his force to nearer five thousand, many of whom, not engaged in the actual construction, were preparing the materials and bringing them together. The ark was being made of pure levium, the wonderful new metal which, although already employed in the construction of aeroplanes and the framework of dirigible balloons, had not before been used for shipbuilding, except in the case of a few small boats, and these used only in the navy.

For mere raw material Cosmo must have expended an enormous sum, and his expenses were quadrupled by the fact that he was compelled, in order to save time, practically to lease several of the largest steel plants in the country. Fortunately levium was easily rolled into plates, and the supply was sufficient, owing to the discovery two years before of an expeditious process of producing the metal from its ores.

The wireless telegraph and telephone offices were besieged by correspondents eager to send inland, and all over Europe and Asia, the latest particulars of the construction of the great ark. Nobody followed Cosmo's advice or example, but everybody was intensely interested and puzzled.

At last the government officials found themselves forced to take cognizance of the affair. They could no longer ignore it after they discovered that it was seriously interfering with the conduct of public business. Cosmo Versál's pressing orders, accompanied by cash, displaced or delayed orders of the government commanding materials for the navy and the air fleet. In consequence, about the middle of July he received a summons to visit the President of the United States. Cosmo hurried to Washington on the given date, and presented his card at the White House. He was shown immediately into the President's reception-room, where he found the entire Cabinet in presence. As he entered he was the focus of a formidable battery of curious and not too friendly eyes.

President Samson was a large, heavy man, more than six feet tall. Every member of his Cabinet was above the average in avoirdupois, and the heavy-weight president of the Carnegie Institution, Professor Pludder, who had been specially invited, added by his presence to the air of ponderosity that characterized the assemblage. All seemed magnified by the thin white

garments which they wore on account of the oppressive heat. Many of them had come in haste from various summer resorts, and were plainly annoyed by the necessity of attending at the President's command.

Cosmo Versál was the only cool man there, and his diminutive form presented a striking contrast to the others. But he looked as if he carried more brains than all of them put together.

He was not in the least overawed by the hostile glances of the statesmen. On the contrary, his lips perceptibly curled, in a half-disdainful smile, as he took the big hand which the President extended to him. As soon as Cosmo Versál had sunk into the embrace of a large easy chair, the President opened the subject.

"I have directed you to come," he said in a majestic tone, "in order the sooner to dispel the effects of your unjustifiable predictions and extraordinary proceedings on the public mind—and, I may add, on public affairs. Are you aware that you have interfered with the measures of this government for the defense of the country? You have stepped in front of the government, and delayed the beginning of four battle-ships which Congress has authorized in urgent haste on account of the threatening aspect of affairs in the East? I need hardly say to you that we shall, if necessary, find means to set aside the private agreements under which you are proceeding, as inimical to public interests, but you have already struck a serious blow at the security of your country."

The President pronounced the last sentence with oratorical unction, and Cosmo was conscious of an approving movement of big official shoulders around him. The disdain deepened on his lips.

After a moment's pause the President continued:

"Before proceeding to extremities I have wished to see you personally, in order, in the first place, to assure myself that you are mentally responsible, and then to appeal to your patriotism, which should lead you to withdraw at once an obstruction so dangerous to the nation. Do you know the position in which you have placed yourself?"

Cosmo Versál got upon his feet and advanced to the center of the room like a little David. Every eye was fixed upon him. His voice was steady, but intense with suppressed nervousness.

"Mr. President," he said, "you have accused me of obstructing the measures of the government for the defense of the country. Sir, I am trying to save *the whole human race* from a danger in comparison with which that of war is infinitesimal—a danger which is rushing down upon us with appalling speed, and which will strike every land on the globe simultaneously. Within seven months not a war-ship or any other existing vessel will remain afloat."

The listeners smiled, and nodded significantly to one another, but the speaker only grew more earnest.

"You think I am insane," he said, "but the truth is you are hoodwinked by official stupidity. *That man,*" pointing at Professor Pludder, "who knows me well, and who has had all my proofs laid before him, is either too thick-headed to understand a demonstration or too pig-headed to confess his own error."

"Come, come," interrupted the President sternly, while Professor Pludder flushed very red, "this will not do! Indulge in no personalities here. I have strained a point in offering to listen to you at all, and I have invited the head of the greatest of our scientific societies to be present, with the hope that here before us all he might convince you of your folly, and thus bring the whole unfortunate affair promptly to an end."

"*He* convince *me!*" cried Cosmo Versál disdainfully. "He is incapable of understanding the A, B, C of my work. But let me tell you this, Mr. President—there are men in his own council who are not so blind. I know what occurred at the recent meeting of that council, and I know that the ridiculous announcement put forth in its name to deceive the public was whipped into shape by *him,* and does not express the real opinion of many of the members."

Professor Pludder's face grew redder than ever.

"Name one!" he thundered.

"Ah," said Cosmo sneeringly, "that hits hard, doesn't it? You want me to name *one;* well, I'll name *three.* What did Professor Alexander Jones and Professor Abel Able say about the existence of watery nebulæ, and what was the opinion expressed by Professor Jeremiah Moses about the actual approach of one out of the northern sky, and what it could do if it hit the earth? What was the unanimous opinion of the entire council about the correctness of my mathematical work? And what," he con-

tinued, approaching Professor Pludder and shaking his finger up at him—"*what have you done with those three despatches from Iceland, the North Cape, and Kamchatka, which absolutely confirmed my announcement that the nebula was already visible?*"

Professor Pludder began stammeringly:

"Some spy—"

"Ah," cried Cosmo, catching him up, "*a spy,* hey? Then, you admit it! Mr. President, I beg you to notice that he admits it. Sir, this is a conspiracy to conceal the truth. Great Heaven, the world is on the point of being drowned, and yet the pride of officialism is so strong in this plodder—Pludder—and others of his ilk that they'd sooner take the chance of letting the human race be destroyed than recognize the truth!"

Cosmo Versál spoke with such tremendous concentration of mental energy, and with such evident sincerity of conviction, and he had so plainly put Professor Pludder to rout, that the President, no less than the other listening statesmen, was thrown into a quandary.

There was a creaking of heavily burdened chairs, a ponderous stir all round the circle, while a look of perplexity became visible on every face. Professor Pludder's conduct helped to produce the change of moral atmosphere. He had been so completely surprised by Cosmo's accusation, based on facts which he had supposed were known only to himself and the council, that he was unable for a minute to speak at all, and before he could align his faculties his triumphant little opponent renewed the attack.

"Mr. President," he said, laying his hand on the arm of Mr. Samson's big chair, which was nearly on a level with his breast, and speaking with persuasive earnestness, "you are the executive head of a mighty nation—the nation that sets the pace for the world. It is in your power to do a vast, an incalculable, service to humanity. One official word from you would save millions upon millions of lives. I implore you, instead of interfering with my work, to give instant order for the construction of as many arks, based upon the plans I have perfected, as the navy yard can possibly turn out. Issue a proclamation to the people, warning them that this is their only chance of escape."

By a curious operation of the human mind, this speech cost Cosmo nearly all the advantage that he had previously gained. His ominous suggestion of a great nebula rushing out of the heavens to overwhelm the earth had immensely impressed the imagination of his hearers, and his uncontradicted accusation that Professor Pludder was concealing the facts had almost convinced them that he was right. But when he mentioned "arks," the strain was relieved, and a smile broke out on the broad face of the President. He shook his head, and was about to speak, when Cosmo, perceiving that he had lost ground, changed his tactics.

"Still you are incredulous!" he exclaimed. "But the proof is before you! Look at the blazing heavens! The annals of meteorology do not record another such summer as this. The vanguard of the fatal nebula is already upon us. The signs of disaster are in the sky. But, note what I say—this is only the *first* sign. There is another following on its heels which may be here at any moment. To heat will succeed cold, and as we rush through the tenuous outer spirals the earth will alternately be whipped with tempests of snow and sleet, and scorched by fierce outbursts of solar fire. For three weeks the sun has been feeding its furnaces with invisible vapor—but look out, I warn you, for the change that is impending!"

These extraordinary words, pronounced with the wild air of a prophet, completed the growing conviction of the listeners that they really had a madman to deal with, and Professor Pludder, having recovered his self-command, rose to his feet.

"Mr. President," he began, "the evidence which we have just seen of an unbalanced mind—"

He got no further. A pall of darkness suddenly dropped upon the room. An inky curtain seemed to have fallen from the sky. At the same time the windows were shaken by tremendous blasts of wind, and, as the electric lights were hastily turned on, huge snowflakes, intermingled with rattling hailstones, were seen careering outside. In a few seconds several large panes of glass were broken, and the chilling wind, sweeping round the apartment, made the teeth of the thinly clad statesmen chatter, while the noise of the storm became deafening. The sky lightened, but at the same moment dreadful thunder-peals shook the building. Two or three trees in the White House grounds were struck by the bolts, and their broken branches were driven through the air and carried high above the ground by the whirling winds, and one of them was

thrown against the building with such force that for a moment it seemed as if the wall had been shattered.

After the first stunning effect of this outbreak of the elements had passed, everybody rushed to the windows to look out—everybody except Cosmo Versál, who remained standing in the center of the room.

"I told you!" he said; but nobody listened to him. What they saw outside absorbed every faculty. The noise was so stunning that they could not have heard him.

We have said that the air lightened after the passage of the first pall of darkness, but it was not the reappearance of the sun that caused the brightening. It was an awful light, which seemed to be born out of the air itself. It had a menacing, coppery hue, continually changing in character. The whole upper atmosphere was choked with dense clouds, which swirled and tumbled, and twisted themselves into great vortical rolls, spinning like gigantic mill-shafts. Once, one of these vortexes shot downward, with projectile speed, rapidly assuming the terrible form of the trombe of a tornado, and where it struck the ground it tore everything to pieces—trees, houses, the very earth itself, were ground to powder and then whirled aloft by the resistless suction.

Occasionally the darkness returned for a few minutes, as if a cover had been clapped upon the sky, and then, again, the murk would roll off, and the reddish gleam would reappear. These swift alternations of impenetrable gloom and unearthly light shook the hearts of the dumfounded statesmen even more than the roar and rush of the storm.

A cry of horror broke from the onlookers when a man and a woman suddenly appeared trying to cross the White House grounds to reach a place of comparative safety, and were caught up by the wind, clinging desperately to each other, and hurled against a wall, at whose base they fell in a heap.

Then came another outburst of lightning, and a vicious bolt descended upon the Washington Monument, and, twisting round it, seemed to envelope the great shaft in a pulsating corkscrew of blinding fire. The report that instantly followed made the White House dance upon its foundations, and, as if that had been a signal, the flood-gates of the sky immediately opened, and rain so dense that it looked like a solid cataract of water poured down upon the earth. The raging water burst into the basement of the building, and ran off in a shoreless river toward the Potomac.

The streaming rain, still driven by the wind, poured through the broken windows, driving the President and the others to the middle of the room, where they soon stood in rills of water soaking the thick carpet.

They were all as pale as death. Their eyes sought one another's faces in dumb amazement. Cosmo Versál alone retained perfect self-command. In spite of his slight stature he looked their master. Raising his voice to the highest pitch, in order to be heard, he shouted:

"These are the first drops of the Deluge! Will you believe now?"

CHAPTER IV.

THE WORLD SWEPT WITH TERROR.

THE tempest of hail, snow, lightning, and rain, which burst so unexpectedly over Washington, was not a local phenomenon. It leveled the antennæ of the wireless telegraph systems all over the world, cutting off communication everywhere. Only the submarine telephone cables remained unaffected, and by them was trasmitted the most astonishing news of the ravages of the storm. Rivers had careered over their banks, low-lying towns were flooded, the swollen sewers of cities exploded and inundated the streets, and gradually news came in from country districts showing that vast areas of land had been submerged, and hundreds drowned.

The downfall of rain far exceeded everything that the meteorological bureaus had ever recorded.

The vagaries of the lightning, and the frightful power that it exhibited, were especially terrifying.

In London the Victoria Tower was partly dismantled by a bolt.

In Moscow the ancient and beautiful Church of St. Basil was nearly destroyed.

The celebrated Leaning Tower of Pisa, the wonder of centuries, was flung to the ground.

The vast dome of St. Peter's at Rome was said to have been encased during three whole minutes with a blinding armor of electric fire, though the only harm done was the throwing down of a statue in one of the chapels.

But, strangest freak of all, in New York a tremendous bolt, which seems to have entered the Pennsylvania tunnel on the Jersey side, followed the rails under the river, throwing two trains from the track, and, emerging in the great station in the heart of the city, expanded into a rose-colored sphere, which exploded with an awful report, and blew the great roof to pieces. And yet, although the fragments were scattered a dozen blocks away, hundreds of persons who were in the stations suffered no other injury than such as resulted from being flung violently to the floor, or against the walls.

Cosmo Versál's great ark seemed charmed. Not a single discharge of lightning occurred in its vicinity, a fact which he attributed to the dielectric properties of levium. Nevertheless, the wind carried away all his screens and electric fans.

If this storm had continued the predicted deluge would unquestionably have occurred at once, and even its prophet would have perished through having begun his preparations too late. But the disturbed elements sank into repose as suddenly as they had broken out with fury. The rain did not last, in most places, more than twenty-four hours, although the atmosphere continued to be filled with troubled clouds for a week. At the end of that time the sun reappeared, as hot as before, and a spotless dome once more over-arched the earth; but from this time the sky never resumed its former brilliant azure—there was always a strange coppery tinge, the sight of which was appalling, although it gradually lost its first effect through familiarity.

The indifference and derision with which Cosmo's predictions and elaborate preparations had hitherto been regarded now vanished, and the world, in spite of itself, shivered with vague apprehension. No reassurances from those savants who still refused to admit any validity in Cosmo Versál's calculations and deductions had any permanent effect upon the public mind.

With amusing inconsequence people sold stocks again, until all the exchanges were once more swept with panic—and then put the money in their strong boxes, as if they thought that the mere possession of the lucre could protect them. They hugged the money and remained deaf to Cosmo's reiterated advice to build arks with it.

After all, they were only terrified, not convinced, and they felt that, somehow, everything would come out right, now that they had their possessions well in hand.

For, in spite of the scare, nobody really believed that an actual deluge was coming. There might be great floods, and great suffering and loss, but the world was not going to be drowned! Such things only occurred in early and dark ages.

Some nervous persons found comfort in the fact that when the skies cleared after the sudden downpour brilliant rainbows were seen. Their hearts bounded with joy.

"The 'Bow of Promise!'" they cried. "Behold the unvarying assurance that the world shall never again be drowned."

Then a great revival movement was set on foot, starting in the Mississippi valley under the leadership of an eloquent exhorter, who declared that, although a false prophet had arisen, whose delusive prediction was contrary to Scripture, yet it was true that the world was about to be punished in unexpected ways for its many iniquities.

This movement rapidly spread all over the country, and was taken up in England and throughout Protestant Europe, and soon prayers were offered in thousands of churches to avert the wrath of Heaven. Multitudes thus found their fears turned into a new direction, and by a strange reaction, Cosmo Versál came to be regarded as a kind of Antichrist who was seeking to mislead mankind.

Just at this juncture, to add to the dismay and uncertainty, a grand and fearful comet suddenly appeared. It came up unexpectedly from the south, blazed brightly close beside the sun, even at noonday, and a few nights later was visible after sunset with an immense fiery head and a broad curved tail that seemed to pulsate from end to end. It was so bright that it cast shadows at night, as distinct as those made by the moon. No such cometary monster had ever before been seen. People shuddered when they looked at it. It moved with amazing speed, sweeping across the firmament like a besom of destruction. Calculation showed that it was not more than 3,000,000 miles from the earth.

But one night the wonder and dread awakened by the comet were magnified a hundredfold by an occurrence so unexpected and extraordinary that the spectators gasped in amazement.

The writer happens to have before him an entry in a diary, which is, probably, the

sole contemporary record of this event. It was written in the city of Washington by no less a person than Prof. Jeremiah Moses, of the Council of the Carnegie Institution. Let it tell its own story:

"A marvelous thing happened this night. I walked out into the park near my house with the intention of viewing the great comet. The park on my side (the west), is bordered with a dense screen of tall trees, and I advanced toward the open place in the center in order to have an unobstructed sight of the flaming stranger. As I passed across the edge of the shadow of the trees—the ground ahead being brilliantly illuminated by the light of the comet—I suddenly noticed, with an involuntary start, that I was being preceded by a *double shadow*, which forked away from my feet.

"I cast my eyes behind me to find the cause of the phenomenon, and saw, to my inexpressible amazement, that *the comet had divided into two.* There were two distinct heads, already widely separated, but each, it seemed to me, as brilliant as the original one had been, and each supplied with a vast plume of fire a hundred degrees in length, and consequently stretching far past the zenith. The cause of the double shadow was evident at once—but what can have produced this sudden disruption of the comet? It must have occurred since last evening, and already, if the calculated distance of the comet is correct, the parts of the severed head are 300,000 miles asunder!"

Underneath this entry was scribbled:

"Can this have anything to do with Cosmo Versál's flood?"

Whether it had anything to do with the flood or not, at any rate the public believed that it had. People went about with fear written on their faces.

The *double shadows* had a surprising effect. The phantasm was pointed out, and stared at with superstitious terror by thousands every night. The fact that there was nothing really mysterious about it made no difference. Even those who knew well that it was an inevitable optical result of the division of the bright comet were thrilled with instinctive dread when they saw that forked umbra, mimicking their every movement. There is nothing that so upsets the mind as a sudden change in the aspect of familiar things.

The astronomers now took their turn. Those who were absolutely incredulous about Cosmo's prediction, and genuinely desirious of allaying the popular alarm, issued statements in which, with a disingenuousness that may have been unintentional, they tried to sidetrack his arguments.

Professor Pludder led the way with a pronunciamento declaring that "the absurd vaporings of the modern Nostradamus of New York" had now demonstrated their own emptiness.

"A comet," said Professor Pludder, with reassuring seriousness, "cannot drown the earth. It is composed of rare gases, which, as the experience of Halley's comet many years ago showed, are unable to penetrate the atmosphere even when an actual encounter occurs. In this case there cannot even be an encounter; the comet is now moving away. Its division is not an unprecedented occurrence, for many previous comets have met with similar accidents. This comet happened to be of unusual size, and the partition of the head occurred when it was relatively near-by—whence the startling phenomena observed. There is nothing to be feared."

It will be remarked that Professor Pludder entirely avoided the real issue. Cosmo Versál had never said that the comet would drown the earth. In fact, he had been as much surprised by its appearance as everybody else. But when he read Professor Pludder's statement, followed by others of similar import, he took up the cudgels with a vengeance. All over the world, translated into a dozen languages, he scattered his reply, and the effect was startling.

"My fellow-citizens of the world in all lands, and of every race," he began, "you are face to face with destruction! And yet, while its heralds are plainly signaling from the sky, *and shaking the earth with lightning to awaken it,* blind leaders of blind try to deceive you!

"They are defying science itself!

"They say that the comet cannot touch the earth. That is true. It is passing away. I myself did not foresee its coming. It arrived by accident, *but every step that it has made through the silent depths of space has been a proclamation of the presence of the nebula,* which is the real agent of the perdition of the world!

"Why that ominous redness which overcasts the heavens? You have all noticed it. Why that blinding brightness which

the comet has displayed, exceeding all that has ever been beheld in such visitors. The explanation is plain: *the comet has been feeding on the substance of the nebula,* which is rare yet because we have only encountered some of its outlying spirals.

"But it is coming on with terrible speed. In a few short months we shall be plunged into its awful center, and then the oceans will swell to the mountain-tops, and the continents will become the bottoms of angry seas.

"When the flood begins it will be *too late* to save yourselves. You have already lost too much precious time. I tell you solemnly that *not one in a million can now be saved.* Throw away every other consideration, and try, *try desperately,* to be of the little company of those who escape!

"Remember that your only chance is in building arks—arks of levium, *the metal that floats.* I have sent broadcast plans for such arks. They can be made of any size, but the larger the better. In my own ark I can take only a selected number, and when the complement is made up *not another soul* will be admitted.

"I have established all my facts by *mathematical proofs.* The most expert mathematicians of the world have been unable to detect any error in my calculations. They try to dispute the data, but the data are already before you for your own judgment. The heavens are so obscured that only the brightest stars can now be seen." (This was a fact which had caused bewilderment in the observatories.) "The recent outburst of storms and floods was the second sign of the approaching end, and the third sign will not be long delayed —*and after that the deluge!*"

It is futile to try to describe the haunting fear and horror which seized upon the majority of the millions who read these words. Business was paralyzed, for men found it impossible to concentrate their minds upon ordinary affairs. Every night the twin comets, still very bright, although they were fast retreating, brandished their fiery simitars in the sky—more fearful to the imagination now, since Cosmo Versál had declared that it was the nebula that stimulated their energies. And by day the sky was watched with anxious eyes striving to detect signs of a deepening of the menacing hue, which, to an excited fancy, suggested a tinge of blood.

Now, at last, Cosmo's warnings and entreaties bore practical fruit. Men began to inquire about places in his ark, and to make preparations for building arks of their own.

He had not been interfered with after his memorable interview with the President of the United States, and had pushed his work at Mineola with redoubled energy, employing night gangs of workmen so that progress was continuous throughout the twenty-four hours.

Standing on its platform, the ark, whose hull was approaching completion, rose a hundred feet into the air. It was 800 feet long and 250 broad — proportions which practical ship-builders ridiculed, but Cosmo, as original in this as in everything else, declared that, taking into account the buoyancy of levium, no other form would answer as well. He estimated that when its great engines were in place, its immense stores of material for producing power, its ballast, and its supplies of food stowed away, and its cargo of men and animals taken aboard, it would not draw more than twenty feet of water.

Hardly a day passed now without somebody coming to Cosmo to inquire about the best method of constructing arks. He gave the required information, in all possible detail, with the utmost willingness. He drew plans and sketches, made all kinds of practical suggestions, and never failed to urge the utmost haste. He inspired every visitor at the same time with alarm and a resolution to go to work at once.

Some did go to work. But their progress was slow, and as days passed, and the comets gradually faded out of sight, and then the dome of the sky showed a tendency to resume its natural blueness, the enthusiasm of Cosmo's imitators weakened, together with their confidence in his prophetic powers.

They concluded to postpone their operations until the need of arks should become more evident.

As to those who had sent inquiries about places in Cosmo's ark, now that the danger seemed to be blowing away, they did not even take the trouble to answer the very kind responses that he had made.

It is a singular circumstance that not one of these anxious inquirers seemed to have paid particular attention to a very significant sentence in his reply. If they had given it a little thought, it would probably have set them pondering, although

they might have been more puzzled than edified. The sentence ran as follows:

"While assuring you that my ark has been built for the benefit of my fellow men, I am bound to tell you that I reserve absolutely the right to determine who are truly representative of *homo sapiens.*"

The fact was that Cosmo had been turning over in his mind the great fundamental question which he had asked himself when the idea of trying to save the human race from annihilation had first occurred to him, and apparently he had fixed upon certain principles that were to guide him.

Since, when the mind is under great strain through fear, the slightest relaxation, caused by an apparently favorable change, produces a rebound of hope, as unreasoning as the preceding terror, so, on this occasion, the vanishing of the comets, and the fading of the disquieting color of the sky, had a wonderful effect in restoring public confidence in the orderly procession of nature.

Cosmo Versál's vogue as a prophet of disaster was soon gone, and once more everybody began to laugh at him. People turned again to their neglected affairs with the general remark that they "guessed the world would manage to wade through."

Those who had begun preparations to build arks looked very sheepish when their friends guyed them about their childish credulity.

Then a feeling of angry resentment arose, and one day Cosmo Versál was mobbed in the street, and the gamins threw stones at him.

People forgot the extraordinary storm of lightning and rain, the split comet, and all the other circumstances which, a little time before, had filled them with terror.

But they were making a fearful mistake!

With eyes blindfolded, they were walking straight into the jaws of destruction.

Without warning, and as suddenly almost as an explosion, the *third sign* appeared, and on its heels came a veritable Reign of Terror!

CHAPTER V.

THE THIRD SIGN.

IN the middle of the night, at New York, hundreds of thousands simultaneously awoke with a feeling of suffocation.

They struggled for breath as if they had suddenly been plunged into a steam bath.

The air was hot, heavy, and terribly oppressive.

The throwing open of windows brought no relief. The outer air was as stifling as that within.

It was so dark that, on looking out, one could not see his own doorsteps. The arc-lamps in the street flickered with an ineffective blue gleam which shed no illumination round about.

House lights, when turned on, looked like tiny candles enclosed in thick blue globes.

Frightened men and women stumbled around in the gloom of their chambers trying to dress themselves.

Cries and exclamations rang from room to room; children wailed; hysterical mothers ran wildly hither and thither, seeking their little ones. Many fainted, partly through terror and partly from the difficulty of breathing. Sick persons, seized with a terrible oppression of the chest, gasped, and never rose from their beds.

At every window, and in every doorway, throughout the vast city, invisible heads and forms were crowded, making their presence known by their voices—distracted householders striving to peer through the strange darkness, and to find out the cause of these terrifying phenomena.

Some managed to get a faint glimpse of their watches by holding them close against lamps, and thus noted the time. It was two o'clock in the morning.

Neighbors, unseen, called to one another, but got little comfort from the replies.

"What is it? In God's name, what has happened?"

"I don't know. I can hardly breathe."

"It is awful! We shall all be suffocated."

"Is it a fire?"

"No! No! It cannot be a fire."

"The air is full of steam. The stones and the window-panes are streaming with moisture."

"Great Heavens, how stifling it is!"

Then, into thousands of minds at once leaped the thought of *the flood!*

The memory of Cosmo Versál's reiterated warnings came back with overwhelming force. It must be the *third sign* that he had foretold. *It had come!*

"Those fateful words—"the flood" and "Cosmo Versál"—ran from lip to lip, and the hearts of those who spoke, and those who heard, sank like lead in their bosoms.

He would be a bold man, more confident in his powers of description than the present writer, who should attempt to picture the scenes in New York on that fearful night.

The gasping and terror-stricken millions waited and longed for the hour of sunrise, hoping that then the stygian darkness would be dissipated, so that people might, at least, see where to go and what to do. Many, oppressed by the almost unbreathable air, gave up in despair, and no longer even hoped for morning to come.

In the midst of it all a collision occurred directly over Central Park between two aero-expresses, one coming from Boston and the other from Albany. (The use of small aeroplanes within the city limits had, for some time, been prohibited on account of the constant danger of collisions, but the long-distance lines were permitted to enter the metropolitan district, making their landings and departures on specially constructed towers.) These two, crowded with passengers, had, as it afterward appeared, completely lost their bearings—the strongest electric lights being invisible a few hundred feet away, while the wireless signals were confusing—and, before the danger was apprehended, they crashed together.

The collision occurred at a height of a thousand feet, on the Fifth Avenue side of the park. Both of the air-ships had their aeroplanes smashed and their decks crumpled up, and the unfortunate crews and passengers were hurled through the impenetrable darkness to the ground.

Only four or five, who were lucky enough to be entangled with the lighter parts of the wreckage, escaped with their lives. But they were too much injured to get upon their feet, and there they lay, their sufferings made tenfold worse by the stifling air, and the horror of their inexplicable situation, until they were found and humanely relieved, more than ten hours after their fall.

The noise of the collision had been heard in Fifth Avenue, and its meaning was understood, but amid the universal terror no one thought of trying to aid the victims. Everybody was absorbed in wondering what would become of himself.

When the long attended hour of sunrise approached, the watchers were appalled by the absence of even the slightest indication of the reappearance of the orb of day. There was no lightening of the dense cloak of darkness, and the great city seemed dead.

For the first time in its history it failed to awake after its regular period of repose, and to send forth its myriad voices. It could not be seen; it could not be heard; it made no sign. As far as any outward indication of its existence was concerned the mighty capital had ceased to be.

It was this frightful silence of the streets, and of all the outer world, that terrified the people, cooped up in their houses, and their rooms, by the walls of darkness, more than almost any other circumstance. It gave such an overwhelming sense of the universality of the disaster, whatever that disaster might be. Except where the voices of neighbors could be heard, one could not be sure that the whole population, outside his own family, had not perished.

As the hours passed, and yet no light appeared, another intimidating circumstance manifested itself. From the start everybody had noticed the excessive humidity of the dense air. Every solid object that the hands came in contact with in the darkness was wet, as if a thick fog had condensed upon it. This supersaturation of the air (a principal cause of the difficulty experienced in breathing) led to a result which would quickly have been foreseen if people could have had the use of their eyes, but which, coming on invisibly, produced a panic fear when at last its presence was strikingly forced upon the attention.

The moisture collected on all exposed surfaces—on the roofs, the walls, the pavements—until its quantity became sufficient to form little rills, which sought the gutters, and there gathered force and volume. Presently the streams became large enough to create a noise of flowing water that attracted the attention of the anxious watchers at the open windows. Then cries of dismay arose. If the water had been visible it would not have been terrible.

But, to the overstrained imagination, the bubbling and splashing sound that came out of the darkness was magnified into the rush of a torrent. It seemed to grow louder every moment. What was but a murmur on the ear-drum became a roar in the excited brain-cells.

Once more were heard the ominous words, "The flood!"

(To be continued.)

The Pink Envelope

By Russ W. Carter

I HAD a definite purpose in going to Fond du Lac, and I also had a definite purpose in securing a front room in a hotel directly opposite the clothing-store of Hathaway & Reid. The fact of the matter is, I had positive knowledge that a crib had not been cracked in the burg for some little time.

Jack "Silk Hat" Halley had lit in and out one night with a bundle of something like eighteen thousand under his arm, but that was over three years ago. Nothing of any consequence had been pulled off since then. I figured the town was ripe for another one. Hence my visit.

For five successive nights I sat in my room with the lights turned low. I could see without being seen. Like a vulture I watched the store of Hathaway & Reid. I saw the clerks and salesmen leave at six. On Wednesdays and Saturdays they stayed till ten. I observed that one of the firm, the senior member, a man with a Vandyke beard, invariably remained after the others had gone. I noticed that he seldom stayed long, but turned out the inner lights, locked the door, and departed usually half an hour after the others.

My vigil did not end there. Twice I sat up all night watching. Nothing escaped my observation. I saw the policeman put out the lights in the show-windows at midnight. A cut-off box had been placed outside for that purpose. I observed that he invariably looked in and tried the door each time he came around. He did this every hour throughout the night.

It was evident that the firm employed no regular watchman. The cop, then, was the only one to look out for. I saw that I would have little difficulty in getting into the building. It was a three-story structure occupied wholly by Hathaway & Reid. On the second floor was the office of the firm. On one side of the building was a narrow alley. Half-way down this a gas-lamp flickered. No chance to enter this areaway from the main stem. It was too well lighted. I would be noticed. Access to it must be from one of its other outlets. In the daytime I took a stroll. I seldom took a stroll unless it was to learn things. My walk took me through several adjacent streets. I noted that the alley had two other openings. There were three ways, then, by which I could get in or out. Little chance of being cornered unless the bulls blocked all three.

Saturday night I decided would be the best time. The receipts would be heaviest on that day, and it was likely that the break would not be discovered until Monday. This would give me ample time to make my getaway.

Eight years as a safe expert in the employ of a Chicago firm of vault-makers had peculiarly fitted me for this work. I was acquainted with all manner of safes, from the humble old-fashioned kind that locked with a key to the modern time-lock type. Whenever a stout banker or a dyspeptic business man found that he could not open his strong-box, I was sent down to see what ailed it. In my eight years I had not found one that baffled me. My employers were proud of my ability in this line. They sent out a challenge to the other safe-makers. They offered five hundred dollars for a vault that I failed to open. This filled me with egotism. I decided that my services were valuable. I figured that I should be working for myself. So I went into the safe-opening business on my own account. I was successful from the start. In the past two years I had cleaned up—well, I had quite a roll. The proceeds of the first eighteen months I put in a bank at Rock Island. Every month I added to it. Then along came some one in the same line of endeavor as myself and cleaned out the bank. The police said it was the work of "Silk Hat"

Halley. Anyhow, I got twenty cents on the dollar. This made me lose confidence in banks. After that I put my money in bonds.

At the hotel in Fond du Lac I ran across an old acquaintance. A fellow named Mason. He had formerly been with me in the employ of the Chicago vault-makers. He was now traveling for an office appliance concern and doing well. I had some little difficulty in evading his questions. He had not seen me for four years, and wanted to know all. I told him I was dabbling in land. He pressed me for information. I was considerably annoyed by his pointed inquiries.

In small towns it is necessary that a stranger have some definite business in being there, otherwise he is apt to be a subject of comment and speculation—perhaps suspicion. I had told the proprietor of the hotel that I was in the realty business. To this effect I put an advertisement in the local paper. The advertisement extolled the merits of my wonderful lands. Every day fifty people called to see me—some with money in their hands. I made the price high. They didn't stop to take off their hats, but flew down-stairs as though the house were afire. It served my purpose. It gave me an excuse for being there. I often wondered, though, if it would not have paid me better to have gone into the land and real estate business in earnest.

I examined the time-tables. I saw that there were two trains leaving Saturday night. One at 8 P.M., the other at 1.50 A.M. I figured on catching the latter. I must pretend to take the former. In this way they would not be apt to connect my leave-taking with the robbery. How could they? I would leave town at eight o'clock, the store could not be entered until after ten, because they kept open until that hour. It was a good alibi should the police take a notion to look over the list of strangers that had been in town during the time the job had been pulled off.

At seven forty-five I paid my bill amid a great bustle and hurry. Impatiently I demanded how much I owed. Three times I asked the proprietor if the eight o'clock train was always on time. I wanted to impress on his mind that I had taken that one. Like a man in a race with death, I grabbed up my grips and tore out. I heard Mason calling after me. He came out close at my heels. He insisted on walking down to the depot with me. Here was unlooked-for contingency. I hurried on, thinking to tire him. I hoped he'd turn back. He kept pace with me, however. Seeing he was determined to see me aboard—a thing which would knock my plans on the head—I stumbled and hurt my ankle. I missed the train. I checked my grips at the depot. We returned to the hotel.

We played billiards until eleven o'clock. I must get away from him or I could not put my plan into execution. I tried to get away while he was in the barber-shop, but he insisted on me coming in with him while he got shaved. We played pool another half hour. He finally signified his intention of turning in. I yawned and acquiesced. I told him I was going to leave on the one-fifty. He shook hands, bid me good-by, and went up-stairs.

Ten minutes later I slipped out by a side entrance. I walked briskly north. It had begun to rain. There were few people on the streets. I had an hour yet before it would be safe to go to work. I spent the time in walking about. I moved fast as though hurrying home out of the rain. I was careful not to walk on the same street twice.

During my three years as a crib-cracker I had acquired much knowledge. Experience is a great teacher, and I had learned many things. I had learned that there is only one way to open a safe—the way it is intended to be opened. In obstinate cases nitroglycerin is good. But it is bothersome and makes such a confounded racket. Quietness is a necessary adjunct to successful operation. I used the nitro once. I found it expeditious and withal very effective. It not only blew the safe door off but came near blowing my head off with it. I immediately discarded it as a precarious method.

I had also learned that the less tools the less chance of being nabbed. Many times I owed my liberty to fleetness of foot. The fat cops couldn't hold a candle to me when it came to kicking up gravel. Had I been hampered with a kit of yeggman's hardware I would have been eating at the county expense long ago. Besides, the police have a way of tagging these things, such as exhibit A, exhibit B, *et cetera, et cetera.* Very embarrassing to have a garrulous lawyer hold one up in court and say: "Gentlemen, here we have a curious

little instrument. You will observe that it is of a hard, metallic substance. An alchemist would probably diagnose its composition as that of a very fine steel. This singular implement, gentlemen, is utilized by those with nefarious motives for the purpose of gaining access to a building or place by unlawful means. It is what is known among habitués of the underworld as a 'jimmy.'"

Therefore the less junk you cart around in this business the less evidence for the jury to gape at. When a jury begins to lean forward, to get a better look at the curious tools found on the defendant, look out! If they stare at them in open-mouthed wonderment you might as well shake hands with your friends and tell the gas company to take out the meter. It's ten to one you won't be home for quite a long while.

Yet some kind of a jimmy is indispensable. In fact, a burglar without a jimmy is like a barber without a razor. I carried a short piece of heavy wagon-spring. If pursued I could throw this away. Few would attach any great importance to an old piece of wagon-spring lying in the street. I also carried a small bottle of chloroform and a gun. The chloroform I could smash against a brick wall. The gun—well, all who carry revolvers are not safe-blowers. I had a special permit. These three were my only tools. No nippers, no skeleton keys, no gags, no files, no rope, no saws, no pinch-bars—not even a valise in which to put the boodle. Awkward to have a "bull" stop you and want to know what you have in the suspicious-looking satchel.

Loot that I could not carry I left behind. Too many had been caught trying to lug too much. So I never took more than I could carry. I usually managed to take away all in sight, however.

I had also learned all about burglar-alarms. In fact, I had invented one or two myself. The principle of the others I understood. Some of them were quite ingenious, but like everything made by man, they had their vulnerable points. It's a poor inventor that doesn't know the weak spots in his own invention. I knew mine and was not long in finding out those of the others.

At twelve o'clock I entered the alley. I was quickly at the rear of Hathaway & Reid's. There were two small windows in the basement These were hid behind a pile of broken boxes. Noiselessly I removed the boxes It took me fully twenty minutes. The slightest noise would bring the bulls down on me. I finally got at one of the windows. There were no iron bars on this Very careless of Hathaway & Reid. They should have had at least wire screens on them to keep out marauders and prowlers.

Shoving my jimmy under the window, I drew up on it steadily. The sash crackled and chipped off. The window refused to budge. Long disuse had wedged it tight. Setting a block of wood under the jimmy for a fulcrum, I placed one foot on it. I jumped quick and gave it my full weight. The catch snapped. A moment later I was inside. A few rats scampered away on my entrance, but that was all. Shading my light about — handy things those cigar-lighters—I saw that the cellar was strewn high with packing cases. Picking my way through these, I quickly brought up at the foot of the stairs leading to the floor above. Up these I crept. A few moments later I stood in the office on the second floor. Before me was the safe. It was a modern affair, ponderous, imposing, defiant. Guaranteed fire, water, and burglar proof. I had seen many such. Given twenty minutes I knew I would have it open. Calmly I went to work. I first gave my attention to the alarms. There were three of these, all different in device, but identical in principle. In two minutes I had put the telltale appliances out of commission. They could do no harm. This done, nothing remained but to open her up and take out the money. There was lots of it, I knew. I fancied I could see the safe sag in the middle under the weight of it. I bent to the task. Patiently I manipulated the tumblers. For ten minutes I worked. My wrist tired. I rested, then went at it again. One by one they dropped into place. How well I knew their sounds—like ten-cent pieces dropping in a copper kettle—each one so alike, yet so distinctive.

One more and she'd swing. Hark! what was that? From somewhere in the vast recesses of the place was borne to me another sound. A sound that set my heart beating like a sledge-hammer, and brought a cold sweat to the roots of my hair. The sound of a key grating in a lock. Yes, there was no mistaking it. There is no

other sound like it. In the deep silence it was distinctly audible. As though turned to stone, I stood listening, waiting—waiting for what? An unpleasant panorama raced in chaos before me. The cops! I've been seen! flashed into my brain. It lodged there and burned like a red-hot iron. Capture! The pen! It all loomed up before me with a sudden and startling hideousness.

Distraught with apprehension, I stood as though clamped to the floor. The rasping scraping continued, then ceased. A bolt shot back, a door squeaked, and a draft of air, cold and damp, was wafted to me from below.

Some one had entered from the street! I heard the catlike tread of the intruder quickly cross the floor beneath. He was at the foot of the stairs. He was just then ascending.

My escape was cut off. I had delayed too long. Trying the door of a room leading off, I found it unlocked. Swiftly, steadily bearing down on the handle to stifle a possible squeak, I pushed it open and glided in, closing it behind me, not a moment too soon. I heard the knob of the outer door turn. The door was opened a few inches. For a full minute I heard nothing. The man had not entered, but was looking in. A tiny beam of light shot across the floor. It deflected and danced on the ceiling overhead. The partitions dividing the various offices stood about eight feet high. From there on up to the ceiling all was open. The next moment the man entered the outer office.

With cocked pistol I stood in the room, breathless, motionless, silent. I had no means of telling what kind of a place I was in. I did not know whether there were other exits or not. I dared not flash my lamp to see. I berated myself for not having done this earlier.

I saw that if I could reach one corner near the door I might escape detection. The door was one that swung inward. Standing in one corner I knew that I would be concealed by it should he open it. If he took a notion to look behind — well, it would be his life or mine. I had sworn that I'd never be taken alive. Inch by inch I edged toward the corner. A gasp, a sigh, the creak of a board would surely betray me.

The man remained in the outer office. He could not be a bull or he would have immediately searched the rooms. He had made no move to do so. Who, then, was it? I waited a while, then noiselessly crept to the door. There was a painted glass panel in this. Through a tiny spot from which the paint had fallen off, I got a view of the man. He was bending before the safe. His dark form was lit up now and then by the light he carried. The reflection of its rays from the glistening safe threw his outlines into bold relief. The man bending before the vault was one of the firm. The one with the pointed beard. He was turning the dial with one hand, now and then glancing at a piece of paper held in the other. Could the man be robbing his own safe? Improbable! Yet such things are not uncommon. His intentions could not be honest, else why had he come in the night? Why had he entered with so much stealth? Why did he glance nervously over his shoulder and stop and listen when a button of my coat grated against the woodwork? Why did he pull out a gun and creep softly to the door of the room in which I stood. Why did he throw back the door and flash his light in, then, muttering, retrace his steps to the safe? He must have some reason for all this. Why was this necessary? He was opening the safe every day and must certainly have the combination firmly in his memory. I crept again to the door. Fortunately he had closed it after him. I saw him fumbling again at the dial. "Ah!" I heard him exclaim. The next moment the vault door swung open. Reaching in he drew forth package after package of bills neatly tied with paper bands and shoved them with a stealthy movement into a satchel.

A bold plan came to me. I would step in and make him disgorge at the point of a gun. But I was restrained. Another scheme had popped into my head. A scheme that gave promise of greater returns —blackmail! It's an ugly word and— what? Despicable, you say. Yes, of course, but, then, mine is a despicable business any way you look at it. What difference is it whether I open a man's safe and take the money, or let him open it and then take it? None that I can see. The method may be different, but the principle is the same. Yes, I would let him depart with the money, then stroll in later and confront him with his crime and— well, the chances were he'd pay willingly,

quickly, and often. I would have a steady income. He would not. Flee the country? No, he was too cute for that. He would come to work Monday and be as much surprised as the others to find that the place had been robbed.

So I allowed him to go. I heard him descend and walk quickly across the floor below. Then came the slamming of a door, the turn of a key, and—silence! I was alone again. Alone with a looted safe.

There was no need to remain longer. The money was where I could put my hands on it at any time. It was just as much in my possession as though it were in my pocket. I passed into the outer office. I stepped on something soft. I picked it up. It was the envelope on which was written the combination. I scanned the figures. Quickly I bent before the safe. Then I thought, of what use to open it now—none. The vault was empty. Nothing of value remained. I tossed the envelope aside, then picked it up again. It might come in handy. I would keep it as evidence—evidence to support my statements when I should face the man who was keeping my money for me. I thrust it in my pocket. I would examine it more closely later. Going down I passed out the same way I had entered. Ten minutes later I had reached the depot and with little preparation was aboard the train bound for Milwaukee.

I would lay low for a while, one week, two weeks, a month if necessary. Then, after the police had failed to solve the robbery and things quieted down, I would waltz in and have a talk with my friend and trustee, the partner with the Vandyke beard.

On the train I drew forth the envelope. It was of peculiar pinkish color, a kind seldom used nowadays. It was addressed to Ralph Conners, 89 —— Street, Peoria. A letter inside was signed "Alice," 635 N. —— Street, Chicago. The letter was couched in endearing terms—to all appearances a love missive. So Mr. Vandyke was also carrying on an intrigue. Good! That would cost him a little more or else interested parties would be informed! Yes, detestable I know, but is it any more detestable for me to demand money for my silence than it is for my victim to carry on clandestine correspondence without his wife's knowledge? If men will commit these indiscretions, then they must pay or be exposed. That's fair, isn't it? You may not take this view of it, but I am not disposed to argue the matter, so we'll let it drop.

I looked at the envelope again. Ralph Conners. I repeated the name over and over. Where had I heard it before? It sounded familiar, but I could not place it. Then I remembered! It came to me like a flash! Ralph Conners, alias Spike Redmond, alias "Silk Hat" Halley! I never had the pleasure of Mr. Halley's acquaintance, but I'd heard enough about him to know that he was no ordinary yeggman. He was clever. I could tell that from reading the newspaper accounts of his exploits. But what was one of the firm of Hathaway & Reid doing with a letter belonging to the most notorious safe-blower in the country? I pondered long over it, and I could not fathom it. All the way to Milwaukee I revolved it over and over in my mind. I failed utterly in its full solution.

The third day in Milwaukee I ran across Mason again. He was just going into a store.

"Wait," he said, "I'll be out in a minute. I've got this fellow on the string for a big order." He went in and I waited. In fifteen minutes he came out, his face radiant.

"It was a cinch," he said. "I stuck the old geezer for five hundred dollars' worth. Heigho! bigga da commish, old kid, bigga da commish." He was highly elated and slapped me on the back in his enthusiasm.

"How's the land graft?" he asked.

"Punk," I replied, then turned the conversation. I had no desire to have him asking pointed questions.

"Why don't you get into this game?" he said. "If you're any kind of a talker at all, you can cop off fifty a week easy. No trouble to get orders if the goods have merit. Drop that land stuff: it's a dead one; too many in it. I've been with this firm three years now, and it's a snap. Just like picking up dust with a suction sweeper. I could get you with these people if you want to take it up."

I told him I would consider the matter.

His work was done for the day. We walked along to his stopping place, talking leisurely.

"Ever play 'pitch'?" he asked.

"Occasionally," I replied.

Time hung heavy on my hands, and I was not unwilling to enter anything that would help make it pass quickly. "Did I tell you I was going to get married?" he remarked, as we threw off our coats in his room.

"No! Are you?" I asked.

"Yep, next week. Got everything all arranged."

"Who's the unlucky woman?" I inquired jokingly.

"You know her," he returned. "Used to be stenographer for a time with the Vault Company.

"Go on," I exclaimed. I was considerably surprised and not a little disappointed by this intelligence, for I had hopes in the direction of that particular young lady myself, and although I had not received much encouragement, I had not yet given up hope.

"Surest thing you know," he said, noting my incredulous look. "She's the finest little woman in the land. Turned down old Dundy himself for me. Yes, sir, and I'm clean daffy about her. When we're hitched I'm going to quit the road and locate somewhere. You must come and see us when we're settled."

"I certainly will," I said, handing him my card. "There's my address. When the honeymoon is over drop me a line, and I'll come up and deliver the paternal blessing and throw a few old shoes to make it interesting."

"Be sure and take the heels off the shoes," he returned with a laugh; then dealt the cards. "Will you keep score?" he asked.

I fished in my pockets for a piece of paper on which to keep track of the points. I could find nothing suitable except the envelope on the back of which was the combination. I had no desire to mark that up. I left it on the table and went over to look in my coat.

"Where the deuce did you get this?" I heard him exclaim. I turned around. In his hand he held the pink envelope. He was gazing at it intently.

"Why, what about it?" I asked, returning to the table.

He paused

"Oh, nothing," he replied, tossing it back. "Only I thought your name was Barry: I was wondering what you were doing with mail addressed to another I bid five on my hand"

I thrust the envelope in my pocket, then looked at my cards. I saw that I had nothing.

"The bid is yours," I said. "What'll it be?"

"Hearts."

We played several games. Finally he said:

"Where did you get that envelope, Barry?"

I then told him the whole story. I omitted nothing. I recounted all from the time I left the employ of the Vault Company to the present. I told him of the many hauls I had made. Of the narrow escapes. Of my various artifices, modes, and methods. Of the money I had lost in the Rock Island Bank. I told him of the Fond du Lac deal. How I had posed as a land speculator. How I had feigned a sprained ankle when he accompanied me to the depot. How I had entered Hathaway & Reid's. How one of the firm had beat me to it. How I proposed to blackmail the man How I had found the letter addressed to Ralph Conners which the man dropped. How I would inform his friends and the writer of the letter as to his true character unless he divided handsomely. Mason listened to me with rapt attention. When I had finished he let out a low whistle.

"Well, upon my soul, Barry, you've certainly got nerve," he said, "but it's a dangerous game. Better quit it before they get you. Take my advice and quit before it's too late. It'll be twenty years if they land you."

I replied that I would quit only when I had made up the sum that I had lost in Rock Island.

"How much did you lose there?" he asked.

I told him. He regarded me intently and with no little astonishment for several moments.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he said. "I've no desire to see you behind the bars, and I know that's where you'll land if you keep on. So I'll give you the amount you lost in Rock Island provided you will agree to quit this thing and engage in some honest enterprise."

To this I would not listen. We argued half an hour. Finally after a prolonged conversation I consented.

"I'll give you this money," he said, "on condition that you hand over that letter you

have and also agree to abandon that blackmail idea." Then he hesitated for quite some time.

We argued another half hour. I finally gave in.

"I can give you most of it in cash," he said, "but will have to give you my note for the balance."

I handed him the letter. He opened a trunk and drew forth a small grip, which he unlocked. He took out several packages of bills neatly tied with paper bands. These he tossed on the table. He also tossed a pointed false beard on the table. The note was signed Ralph Connors. We finished the game in silence.

Europe is Wonderful

By Ward Muir

"EUROPE is wonderful," said Mitchael.

"All Americans say that," I ventured.

"It's a mere phrase with most of us," he retorted. "We generally cap it by an assertion that America is more wonderful still."

"What made you discover Europe's wonderfulness?" I asked.

"Asia," he answered strangely.

I looked at Mitchael as he lay back in the club chair and drew at a cigar. He was still young; he represented, immensely, the American type; but there lurked in his eyes a kind of smoldering knowledge of things.

How to describe him? I cannot. Yet he was worth describing, this master of a vast fortune and of an intricate business. New York respected in him the sole chief of "the Mitchael firm," as it was generally called—an exceedingly old banking, money-lending association, originally Jewish, now Americanized. Mitchael's grandfather had had Hebrew blood in his veins. Mitchael's father betrayed it less markedly; Mitchael himself not at all. He was an American to his finger-tips—I, who am an Englishman, can but vaguely define what I imply by "American," though its outward seeming is plain enough to me—and had begun his business career in the office in Broadway. He had not liked it. There was a streak of the artist in him. He read poetry, he admired pictures—he was, in short, by no means the normal business man. So he had fretted, chained to his desk. But his

grandfather—his father died young—only shrugged his shoulders. "You will grow accustomed to it, John," he reiterated. "Give yourself a year or two; and if at the end of that time you still want to leave the firm, I will let you off, and find another successor."

John Mitchael agreed to the bargain, and studied hard at economics—the economics of the commercial world. His grandfather always spoke of "Finance," and one felt that he used a capital F for the word. Grandfather Mitchael made no "corners" in anything; he had never wrecked a railroad or created a trust. His transactions were far subtler than those of the "magnates" whose exploits flared daily in the press. He negotiated important loans, moved stupendous sums of money, like chessmen, about the globe, from Japan to Russia, from Russia to Japan, and then back to Belgium or Peru. This was the trade to which he wished to train young John Mitchael, his grandson.

The latter, in the end, had taken to it with zest. What was the cause of his change? "Europe," said John Mitchael. In the New York club lounge, over a cigar and a cocktail, he told me the following story:

"There was no romance in business, I thought," young Mitchael began. "The alleged romance which I read about in the sensational papers nauseated me—the romance of preposterous fortunes made by gambling or by what was little better than robbery and fraud. My grandfather's business differed, it is true, from these, but it did not appeal to me. Still, when he said that he proposed to send me to his London office for a year, I was pleased. I had never been in England before, though I had visited Italy.

"An antique Scotchman, MacBrayne by name, ruled the London office; the shrewdest man I think I have ever met. He was kind to me; took me into companionship immediately, with a disarming frankness. He may have been acting on instructions from my grandfather. At any rate, I was flattered and grateful.

"He knew everybody worth knowing in the City of London—not the little people, but the big ones, the really tremendous men whose names were a byword throughout the world. MacBrayne stood on friendly terms with them all; he lunched daily with millionaires—and not the sort of millionaires with whom one can lunch—but with whom one doesn't in the least want to lunch—in New York. MacBrayne took me with him, often, to his club.

"It was on one of these occasions that we met Salmon.

"He came along the aisle between the tables — a tall, thin man, with a neatly trimmed brown beard, streaked with gray —beautifully dressed, in a frock coat, and carrying a silk hat.

"MacBrayne beckoned to him, and he nodded and joined us at our table. Having given his hat to a waiter, he shook hands, and sat down. I was introduced.

"'So you're Mitchael's grandson?' he said. 'Welcome to London.'

"He had turned to the menu and now ordered a very frugal meal.

"'You have already entered your grandfather's business?' he continued, addressing me. 'It is a fine business—oh, a fine business.'

"Only then did I notice that his English was not that of an Englishman. What his nationality was, I did not then know. His face told no tale. It was sallow, a shade Jewish-looking, perhaps; the eyes were large and dark and their pupils tinged with blue. He talked easily and well, was particularly gracious to me, and invited me when at leisure to call at his house in Bayswater.

"I went, and spent several quiet, but indefinably agreeable evenings with him. Seemingly he was not married; no wife or child appeared on these occasions. But he 'did me well,' as you say, and after dinner we had a game of billiards and smoked the finest cigars I have ever met. On one occasion he took me to the opera, where he rented a box. On another we went to a music hall. And I met him almost daily in the city.

"Picture to yourself this man, please; a tall, well-dressed financier of the city of London; coming from Bayswater to the bank in his automobile, dining at his club, spending the evening at his theater. Outwardly orthodox, except for this distinctive touch of foreignness; a man you might see hundreds to match in Lombard Street tomorrow.

"MacBrayne, plied with questions by me, could tell me little about him. 'A big man, Salmon,' was all he said. 'Has Eastern interests. Is worth a million at

least. A Jew? I don't think so. Armenian, perhaps.'

"The summer was passing, and on the whole I was happy enough in London. It was two months since I had left New York. Already I had begun to catch a faint inkling of the meaning of Europe, the profound difference there lies between, for instance, London and New York. But business was not interesting me much, and MacBrayne, for all his trouble, could not rouse my enthusiasm. I followed politics, and the money market, closely, and fairly conscientiously; but my heart was not in it.

"Until one day there arose the important question of the Asia Minor Development Syndicate.

"MacBrayne was intensely occupied with the details of this project. German money was in it—that was the cant phrase; but to people like my grandfather and MacBrayne there is no nationality in money—no German money any more than there is American money—there is only money itself, and the raising of it. We might, or might not, be involved in the Asia Minor syndicate. It behooved MacBrayne to study the situation very closely and cunningly.

"Presently it appeared—at least, so he told me—that the value or otherwise of the scheme turned entirely on the length of the projected railroad. Some of it was already built; some more was planned; but unless the railroad was carried on to an inland town called Schief, its value, according to MacBrayne, would be negligible.

"'Why shouldn't they continue it to Schief, if they can get the money?' I asked.

"'Because between Schief and Benra lies the Holy City of Kem,' said MacBrayne.

"'Holy City?'

"'There are more holy cities in the Near East than Mecca and Medina,' explained MacBrayne. 'The fanatics may think it a defilement to have the railroad carried past Kem. If they do, there'll be trouble. If we could find out definitely whether the road can be carried on—well, it would make a lot of difference in the firm's policy toward the Asia Minor syndicate.'

"He reflected for a space. 'Salmon knows,' he said at last.

"'How do you know he knows?'

"'He's sure to know. He has Asia Minor in his pocket, has Salmon. If I could only find out what his opinion is—'

"Rather idiotically I said: 'Why not ask him?'

"MacBrayne looked at me hard. Suddenly he slapped his thigh. 'Why not ask him?' he shouted. 'After all, why not? Laddie, you have a genius for simplicity. Go and ask him yourself. Never mind whether he tells you the truth or not—just ask him, and as you value your life, remember precisely what he says in reply, and come and repeat it to me.'

"I was amused. It did not seem to me a very difficult task to go and ask Salmon whether the railroad would be continued to Schief or would stop off at Benra. I put on my hat and went out into the city, to Salmon's office.

"I remember noticing anew the little difference between London and New York, and thinking: 'After all, New York is better. I am beginning to tire of London.' Then I thought of my lunch, and where I would go for it, and wondered how long Salmon would keep me. 'In half an hour I shall be back with MacBrayne,' I thought.

"But it was almost a month before I saw MacBrayne again.

"Salmon was not at his office.

"His chief clerk saw me. 'Mr. Salmon has gone to Constantinople,' he said. 'We do not know the date of his return.'

"To Constantinople! The name was delicious. Imagine going to Constantinople! I felt almost inclined to laugh outright.

"'We have a branch at Constantinople,' the clerk went on, 'and Mr. Salmon has a private residence there.'

"A private residence at Constantinople! I thought of Salmon's private residence at Bayswater—and vaguely pictured it planted down on the shores of the Bosporus.

"'He will probably remain in Constantinople several weeks,' said the clerk politely.

"I thanked him, and moved out into the roaring street. And suddenly I chuckled. I stepped into the nearest telephone call-box and rang up MacBrayne.

"'Salmon's gone to Constantinople,' I said. 'Shall I follow him?'

"I heard MacBrayne snicker, 'All right.'

"If he had been there I could have fallen on his neck and kissed him.

"'Catch the 2.20 Folkestone train,' I heard him saying. 'You can get the Orient express at Paris. Don't book direct to Constantinople; go to Kustendji, on the Black Sea, and thence by the mail-boat. I've always found it saved several hours.'

"So MacBrayne had been in Constantinople? Funny that I never realized that he must have traveled.

"'I'll send down some money to the train,' his voice went on. 'If you want more, go to Metaltopos in Constantinople; he'll supply you. But don't come back till you've seen Salmon.'

"He rang off. I sprang into a cab and drove round to my rooms to pack a bag. At two o'clock I was at Charing Cross.

"It was great fun to be going to Constantinople.

"Four days later I was looking down on Constantinople from the Pera Palace hotel. A fabulous sight. Here was something really new, something that America could not show. The East! We have our Chinatowns, our Asiatic quarters—they are mere squalid adaptations of America. This was the real thing—and four days from Lombard Street! Europe is wonderful, I said to myself.

"What a city! What a devil of a mess of a place! And what a mystery, to Western eyes! I came back to that, again and again—what a mystery!

"Behind those crumbling walls, those secretive windows—what was going on? Did human beings live within? Of course; but what had they in common with John Mitchael of New York and London? Look at the streets—their squalor, their dust and dogs and sunshine and smells—is this street, is the Galata Bridge, on the same planet as Broadway, or the Strand? Incredible!

"The heat was tremendous. Boyishly I rejoiced in it, and having changed my clothes, went forth accompanied by an individual who had been provided as my guide by the hotel proprietor. My 'dragoman,' I ought to say. 'Dragoman!' a fine word, to be sure! My guide's—no, my dragoman's—name was Ali. He was a magnificent rogue, and faithful withal.

"Salmon's place of business, surrounding a cool courtyard and quaintly different from his London office, was soon found. Another chief clerk received me, most courteously. Mr. Salmon had gone.

"Where?

"He had gone to Damascus.

"I nearly guffawed. To think of anybody going to Damascus! In biblical days—yes; but in the days of telegraphs and the turbine—oh, it was great. Damascus! I rolled the name on my tongue.

"Would Mr. Salmon make a long stay in Damascus?

"'Probably,' said the clerk. 'Mr. Salmon generally went to Damascus at this time of year. Mr. Salmon has a house at Damascus.'

"I withdrew.

"'Ali,' I said to my guide—no, my dragoman—'Ali, I want to go to Damascus. At once.'

"'Ver' good, sir,' said Ali. 'Steamer to Beyrut leaves this afternoon. From Beyrut on horseback. I will come.'

"I struck a bargain with him. A few hours later we were passing the Dardanelles in an excessively uncomfortable steamer. Ali was visibly swollen with his own idea of grandeur.

"At Beyrut we bought a pair of ordinary horses, and plunged inland on the great caravan track which—before the railroad—joined that seaport with Damascus. And as we trotted, I could have sung. This was the East—this was, too, in a sense, Lombard Street and the Mitchael firm. We stretch long tentacles, we Mitchaels. I had never realized it definitely before. A train of camels passed us, padding along, rolling like ships, chewing crisscross with their monstrous lips, and carrying swollen loads of merchandise. Now that I came to think of it, those camels might belong to Mitchaels, through some series of obscure and roundabout mortgages and loans. Odd! I rode, most of the time, in a state approaching stupor.

"At last, here was Damascus, spread out, a tangle of little flat roofs, of minarets, and mosque-domes.

"Exquisite! It was a dream to me. We rode soon into outrageously narrow and tortuous streets, thronged with impossible people, sellers of everything which one did not want, buyers of things no Westerner could even recognize. And the numerous smells!—

"Behold, when a kindly consul had guided me to the vast and inscrutable mansion of Salmon (it was here that I began to gather that to half the world his name was Suleyman) he was not at home. He

had gone, it seemed, to El Alad, a village some hundred miles south, where he owned what appeared to be a country residence. He generally spent a few weeks of the autumn at El Alad, we learned.

"The consul pressed me to stay. He would show me Damascus. I declined. I was on my mettle now. I would find Salmon or die in the attempt. Before dawn next morning Ali and I were riding out of Damascus and on to the desert under a velvet heaven of stars. The scene was very impressive.

"Never, to the end of my life, shall I savor another experience so fresh, so poignant, as that. The journey — it took two days—was a revelation. I felt as though I were off the planet. The world simply could not contain New York and this. I am a business man, not a poet; I cannot attempt to describe to you that absorbing journey. It had its small discomforts, its small unpleasant mishaps. To me it was one long, delightful thrill. And when, finally, topping a ridge, we looked down, across the stony sands, to an oasis of palms where nestled a village, and I was told that this was El Alad, I could have shouted for sheer joy, not at having found my goal, but at having seen so unbelievable a spectacle. I had been to Rome, to Florence, to other show-places—they had not moved me as that dirty oasis-village moved me.

"A large house, white and windowless on its outer walls, stood at the outskirts of the village. It was Salmon's. In a very short time Ali, the dragoman, brought me to it, and formally intimated my arrival to the doorkeeper.

"We were taken in, and passed through a lovely quadrangle, in which pomegranates and oranges hung their shining fruits over a fountain-basin. A moment later I was being announced at an inner apartment.

"I moved forward into a rather dim light, and found myself in a spacious room. Round the walls were cushions, on which squatted a dirty regiment of Syrians; at their head, on a larger cushion, sat a finer figure.

"I was stunned when I saw him. Somehow I had never expected this. There he sat, or rather crouched, the mouthpiece of a hooka—a narghile—a hubble-bubble—I don't know its proper name—between his lips. His attire was loose and flowing. On his head was a turban. His feet were in loose slippers.

"Salmon—the man I had seen in London wearing a frock coat and top hat! This crouching creature was the same Salmon!

"I blinked, then pulled myself together, and advanced, bowing with as much ceremony as I could compass. I felt that some ceremony was right, but precisely how I ought to behave I knew not. I felt foolish and absurd, in my tailor-made clothes, in the midst of these stately gowned elders. I felt mean and anachronistic. However, I walked forward, and greeted Salmon as best I could.

"His eyes brightened; he held out his hand to me, then waved me to a seat at his side. This I did, but I crouched uncomfortably.

"Salmon called aloud, in a foreign tongue, and immediately two negroes appeared, carrying trays. I was offered unnamable sweetmeats, sherbet, coffee. I took the last.

"The men round the room regarded me with polite interest, and kept silence. Salmon said something to them at length, and they rose, and with innumerable bowings to each of us, quitted the room.

"'Well?' said Salmon in English, turning to me.

"'You must pardon this intrusion,' said I. It was banal, and I felt it.

"'I am joyful to see you,' he returned. 'This house is yours as long as you care to stay.'

"'It is kind of you to say so,' I replied. 'In common decency, I must explain the object of my visit. I come to ask you whether the Asia Minor syndicate's rail will be continued as far as Schief.'

"He laughed gently. 'You are Western,' was all he said.

"I felt crushed; and it was only later that I found that he meant the remark sincerely as a compliment.

"'Come with me,' he went on, and rose. 'I will show you your apartments,' starting in that direction.

"I followed him.

"'This is my native village,' he explained. 'I left it when a boy, and it was always my desire to come back here and build a house in which to take rest. I realized my ambition some years ago. I come here often now. I am the greatest man in my village.' He spoke quite un-

boastfully. 'It gives me pleasure to see the surrounding sheiks come in to drink coffee.'

"He led me to the roof of his dwelling, and then I saw how large it was—and how clandestine. Courtyard after courtyard gaped beneath us, each with its fountain-basin and its foliage and luscious fruit. Exquisitely carved windows opened on to the largest of these courts.

"'That is the harem!' he said, pointing.

"Odd! Imagine Salmon, of the city of London, possessing a harem! This business man, with his top hat and frock coat, owned a harem in Syria! Perhaps a harem at Constantinople, too! And at Damascus! Even at Bayswater! And he spoke of his harem as he might have spoken of his potato-patch or his grand piano. 'That's the harem,' he said; and as I followed his outstretched finger I seemed to see veiled and voluptuous figures behind the lattice, peeping out on me; soulless, lovely houris, with languishing eyes, tended by maidens who played on curious and mournful instruments, and by eunuchs who brought in sherbet on beaten-brass trays.

"Comic! But I did not grin; though, vulgarly, I felt very much inclined to grin.

"Salmon showed me the rest of his house in detail—a strange and beautiful place, cool in the blazing sun by day, and looked down on at night by a moon of glittering gold.

"I was free of his house, he indicated. Servants—slaves, I guessed them to be—would attend to my wants, under the direction of my own dragoman. In the meantime I was invited to repose.

"I did repose—for many hours, wakening only to hug myself, from time to time, and gloat gleefully on this bizarre escapade.

"Next day I once again joined Salmon at his audience with the local sheiks, and there was much coffee-drinking and many exchanges of wearisome courtesies. When the sheiks had retired Salmon took me for a ride in the desert, upon magnificent Arab horses. As I watched him flying across the burning sands I again had a vision of Lombard Street and his top hat. Amazing!

"That evening I insisted on broaching, once more, the subject of the Schief railway. I told Salmon that I could not linger. MacBrayne would be wondering what had become of me.

"Salmon stroked his beard.

"At last he spoke. 'I will tell you confidentially. The railway will be extended to Schief.'

"That was all he would say.

"I thanked him for the information, privately made a note of his exact words, and, a day later, started back for Damascus and London."

Mitchael paused, and drew forth a fresh cigar.

"So now you see what converted me to business," he said. "Its romance was taught me by that fantastic journey. Salmon in his top hat contrasted with Suleyman Effendi in his flowing robes—they impressed me enormously. I was only a youth, of course, but—it was fine, somehow—" he hesitated.

"Europe," he went on, "is wonderful, and you Europeans don't know it. The air of the East blows across Europe. That's the explanation in a nutshell. The East tinges Europe. You do not see it; I never saw it until then. Salmon opened my eyes. I went back to business a new man. If this was business, it was also poetry, it was art. For it had precisely that quality which I imagined business lacked—it had mystery."

I watched Mitchael light his cigar; and I reflected that I was looking at one of the most influential men in the world—a man without whom armies or governments could do little or nothing. And naturally I was moved to ask:

"What came of the Asia Minor syndicate? Was the railway extended to Schief?"

Mitchael grinned.

"I think that was what finished my conversion to a life of business," he said. "As soon as I got back to London MacBrayne asked me what Salmon had said; and when I told him he at once wrote a cable to my grandfather. It was a code cable, of course, but the gist of it was this: 'Don't have anything to do with the Asia Minor rail.' And MacBrayne was right. It was never extended to Schief. It never will be."

"Salmon had lied to you, then?" I queried.

"Well," Mitchael demurred, "he had said in El Alad what he would never have

said in London. He knew that the rail wouldn't reach Schief. But—well—at El Alad he couldn't say that outright. So he said the opposite. It sounds queer, to us; but really it is absolutely trite. MacBrayne spotted this. He knew that Salmon would prevaricate, at El Alad; he knew that Salmon was the soul of honor at Bayswater. Oh, MacBrayne converted me to the beauty of our business nearly as much as the journey did. We saved a million or more by not going into the Asia Minor thing. And, as MacBrayne said, it was all thanks to me. Just my simple suggestion: 'Why not ask Salmon?' and the journey afterward—and then carefully believing precisely the reverse of what Salmon said. Simple—yes—when you know how!"

Mitchael puffed a circumambient cloud to the ceiling.

"Europe is wonderful," he continued murmuring.

THE DEATH OF AMAL.

He lay upon his bed of beaten gold
  And called for music, and they brought it him.
First they essayed the songs he loved of old—
  Of love, of languor. With set features grim
He started up: "Nay, play no more of those!
I want no songs of languor or repose!

"Let them play war-songs, that I used to chant
  Upon the battle-field when hated foes
Were dashing on our spears! No recreant
  In all our ranks was found; the battle's close
Saw many fallen, lying where I lie.
Play faster, you! I will not, must not die!

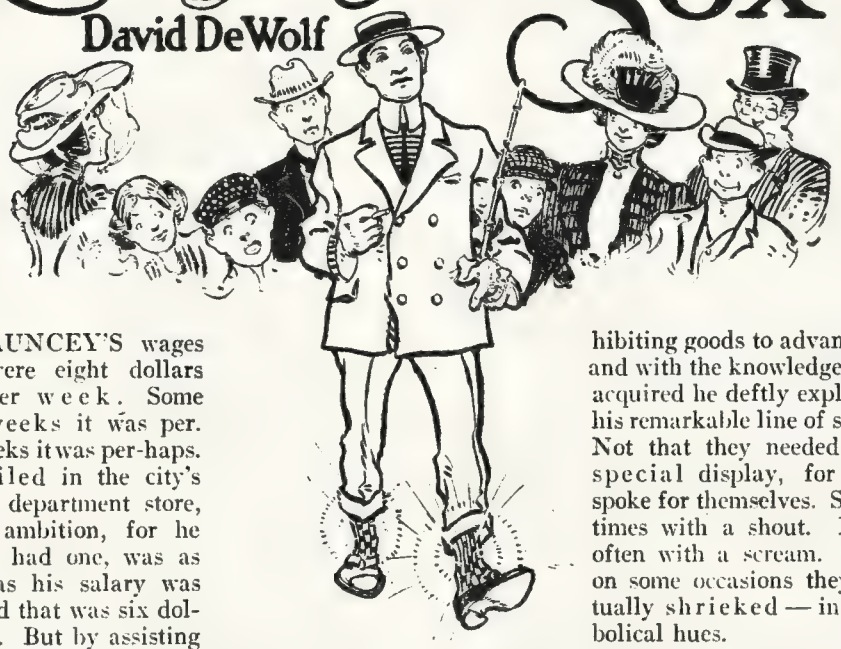
"Play faster, faster!" So they played a while,
  Madly, tumultuously; and on his face
There came a smile, a fierce and savage smile,
  Exultant, like a hunter in the chase,
A warrior in the fight. The music ceased
And Amal whispered to the white-faced priest:

"Let there be songs like these beside my grave;
  I want no chants of sad funereal kind,
No solemn hymns; but carols loud and brave,
  That ring like sword on shield, that seeks to find
The bold heart beating there so strong and well!
So it found—me. Play on!" But silence fell.

Robert Francis Allen.

"Chauncey's New Sox"

by David DeWolf



CHAUNCEY'S wages were eight dollars per week. Some weeks it was per. Other weeks it was per-haps.

He toiled in the city's leading department store, and his ambition, for he assuredly had one, was as large as his salary was small, and that was six dollars—per. But by assisting the window-dresser after hours he usually picked up his two extra dollars each week—and that was perhaps.

As paradoxical as it may seem, Chauncey's great ambition was his most conspicuous weakness. True, almost every one has a hobby, but his came dangerously near being a mania, for he was contentment personified if the proud possessor of a new pair of socks. For the every-day brand of men's hosiery he entertained a marked disgust as he had very acute ideas as to socks, which everybody who had gazed upon his hose was most free to admit. Only the wildest, weirdest patterns and colors were allowed to adorn his pedal extremities.

To view him on the street would create a suspicion that his salary was at least two thousand per annum, but to catch a glimpse of him in his hall bedroom—four flights back, amid an oil-stove, a frying-pan, and all the other paraphernalia of a light-housekeeping economist — opinion would be reasonably certain not to place it above three-fifty a week—perhaps.

Chauncey was artistic, in a degree. A slight one, however. His window-dressing experience had taught him the value of exhibiting goods to advantage, and with the knowledge thus acquired he deftly exploited his remarkable line of socks. Not that they needed any special display, for they spoke for themselves. Sometimes with a shout. More often with a scream. And on some occasions they actually shrieked — in diabolical hues.

To further enhance the display of his hosiery, in spite of the audaciousness of their character, Chauncey's trousers were always adorned with the widest cuff it has ever been the good fortune of a freak tailor to feast his eyes upon, and as a climax he always wore low shoes of bulldog design. In consequence, when the four seasons of the year rolled around, they always found Chauncey's trousers and shoes at the same mark. It mattered not if the thermometer played tag with zero or hovered around the century mark of a hot summer day, his pride —and his socks, amalgamated so closely with his pride, it seems unkind to refer to them apart—ever kept him at an admirable warmth of temperature.

Every one of the twelve hundred employees in the busy department store knew Chauncey. Chauncey Sox, as they labeled him, for he had entered the establishment several years prior, a little, dirty-faced bundle-boy, yet in all that time no one either knew or had ever heard his last name. Even his pay-envelope weekly bore the simple inscription of "Chauncey."

They all pitied him, even the cash-girls, for it was a well-known fact that his passion

for loud and lurid socks often left him without the price of a meal. But he would pull up his trousers, feast his eyes upon his hose, and stride off in the most debonair manner, filled to the brim—with satisfaction. But it was generally predicted, however, that Chauncey would soon be a public charge, unless either his salary was raised or his passion for socks abated. But he went cheerily on drawing his eight per-haps, and weekly adding to his already extensive line of truly remarkable socks.

II.

At Chauncey's lodging-house, living on the same floor and occupying an adjoining room, was an old inventor whom he had often befriended in small ways, until a fast friendship had sprung up between the two boarders.

He was a German by birth and enjoyed the meager comforts of a small income from some distant relative in his far-off country. Thus, not being burdened with the cares of a livelihood, his whole mind had been given to his life's study—glass weaving. He had been a glass-blower for years in his native Germany, and after much time and research had about perfected a process whereby glass could be substituted for silk in the manufacture of undergarments and similar commodities.

Chauncey was the only being to whom the old German had ever imparted the intricacies of his solution, and, although Chauncey had never fully realized the true greatness of the old man's discovery, he took keen pleasure in spending many of his evenings in the company of this kindly old genius. To Chauncey the old German was a most interesting individual and the only friend which his otherwise dull life had ever known.

Often, too, the old inventor would be awaiting the boy at the top of the stairs, eager to inform him of his day's researches. Thus, one evening, upon his return from the store, Chauncey found the old man in an unusual state of excitement.

"Mine boy! Mine boy!" he exclaimed. "I have it! I have it!"

"What is it you have?" inquired Chauncey.

"Vy der solution—der solution!" excitedly declared the enthusiastic man. "At last I have compounded an azotic acid that vill make a thread of glass as soft as silk!" and he wrung his hands with joy, as he paced back and forth along the narrow hallway. Then he paused and placed his two hands upon the boy's shoulders. He looked into Chauncey's face with a pair of sparkling eyes that were now filled with tears of triumph.

"Think! Think! I have made glass into silk! Wonderful! Wonderful! Is it not?"

True, his unceasing labors of years had come to an end. He had really solved what he considered at one time an improbability. A once complex problem had now become, in this old German's hands, a simple possibility.

About this time Chauncey had a birthday. But, owing to his reticent ways, no one knew of it except the old inventor. He had known it for some time, for, as a bit of relaxation, he had figured out Chauncey's horoscope, and in this way he knew just the hour and very moment of Chauncey's birth.

On the particular day to which this narrative has now arrived, Chauncey was sleeping as only Chauncey could, when a sharp knock upon his door startled him so that when he had really opened his eyes he found himself standing with his hand upon the door-knob. He turned the key sleepily, opened the door, then rubbing his eyes for the fraction of a moment, peered out into the hallway. Presently the old inventor became plainly discernible, as he stood there before him in the twilight of a breaking dawn that was now creeping in through the little top landing skylight.

"This vas the hour of your birth, boy," he said, as a merry twinkle lit up his kindly old face. "Und may you see many, many happy returns of the day." And, as he passed Chauncey a neatly tied package, he added, "A token to bind our friendship." Then quietly turning away, he disappeared out of the shadows of the hall into his room.

Chauncey stood in the doorway, half awake, half asleep, trying to figure it all out, when the fact suddenly dawned upon him that this was really and truly his birthday.

He closed the door and lit the light, for an overwhelming curiosity had taken possession of him. He quickly snapped the string and rolled the box out of the wrapping paper onto the bureau. As he did so, the cover of the box came off and brought to view what Chauncey considered the most

remarkable pair of socks his eyes ever rested upon.

How they sparkled and shone, even under the rays of his old attic lamp! He stood in wonderment and admiration, drinking in their rainbow colorings of brilliant orange, punctuated here and there with swastikas of glittering green and blue. In all his wildest fancies he had never dreamed of a creation in socks to equal these that now lay before him.

Suddenly the significance of it all flashed through his half awakened brain. They were made of glass! And *he* was to be the first mortal that ever wore glass socks! His chest heaved with an ungovernable pride; his nerves tingled with excitement, and his thanks went out to the old inventor in silent, loving thoughts.

III.

CHAUNCEY'S birthday was no ordinary one. It was the opening of spring and the sun that had risen an hour from behind the silhouetted outline of the city now seemed to be fairly outshining itself with brightness. The pungent odor of an early spring permeated the air. The birds fluttered from tree to tree, chirping their vernal lays, while the city's great army of toilers were wending their way toward their daily work.

Suddenly, turning a corner into the city's principal thoroughfare, strode Chauncey—and his new socks. A hurrying, scurrying populace halted in nonplused confusion at the puzzling sight before them, as Chauncey, with buoyant stride and head held high, swaggered proudly down the street, followed by a mighty perplexed lot of individuals.

Neither gibe nor jeer came from those many throats; not even an insinuating glint of sneer was visible, as the crowd, through an involuntary curiosity, fell in with the procession that was now following in the wake of those socks. Socks, such as no mortal had ever seen before. Socks, that, as the sunlight hit them, lit up and cast out about them a prismatic halo, that fairly danced along the sidewalk to Chauncey's swinging gait. Every step that he took flittered in and out of a circle of brilliant, radiant hues that changed their color and form at every tread.

This iridescent phenomenon cast its kaleidoscopic forms in endless variety hither and thither along the pavements, until the scrutinizing and inquisitive propensities of half the business district had reached fever-heat, long before Chauncey arrived at his place of employment.

In consequence, the crowds grew to such proportions he was obliged to seek the middle of the street, where the on-surging people now choked the arteries of traffic. The cars stopped, the teamsters drew rein, and automobiles found themselves powerless before the advancing mass of humanity.

The sight soon resembled a procession of the unemployed, and at every corner a knight of the law would club or elbow his way through the surging mass only to find he was utterly powerless to curb its progress or arrest the cause of it all.

At last Chauncey reached the store, late of course, and as the vast crowd swayed back and forth before the great building, the street echoing with their mighty shouts, he dashed through the main entrance with a feeling akin to the lost mariner sailing into a haven of safety, and started down the main aisle toward his department.

When lo! the brilliant gleam from a hundred electric arcs reached those socks. A moment more and the store was in mild confusion. Everything was suddenly irisated. A flood of colored mosaics fluttered about on the blank, white ceilings, like a thousand butterflies in frolicsome canter.

The few early shoppers drew back in awe. The salespeople and cash-girls gazed upon the strange sight in open-mouthed wonderment, while the entire business of the vast establishment came to a sudden standstill. One department after the other, notified by that lightning telegraphy—gossip—flocked by twos and threes in eager haste to catch a view of Chauncey's new socks.

In a short space of time the center aisle resembled a race-track at just the moment when the winners are about to come under the wire. Craned to their utmost, out from each side of the aisle, stretched hundreds of curious heads, in frantic effort to obtain an ocular observation of those fantastically unique hose.

For the first time in all his life, Chauncey began to wish he had never seen a pair of socks. His vanity fast began to ebb under all this clamorous piercing scrutiny. Where to go or what to do, he knew not. Penned in on all sides, he stood there in helpless confusion, looking askance of the many that surrounded him.

A tap upon his shoulder suddenly aroused

him from his thoughts and he turned to look in the face of Jordan White, the proprietor of the store.

"Young man, we won't need your services any longer, so kindly leave this establishment at once."

Discharged! Chauncey's heart, and incidentally his pocketbook, were at one and the same moment broke. With the surging confusions of humiliation and disgrace running rampant through his mind, he felt himself pushed on toward the street, his head awhirl, his face flushed. But before he passed out into the waiting crowd, a nicely groomed merchant locked arms with him and they went off through the store engaged in earnest conversation, finally disappearing through a side entrance into a waiting taxicab.

That was the last seen of Chauncey until one day, several weeks later, when, dressed in the height of fashion—his bulldog oxfords, wide-cuffed trousers, and promiscuous socks, things of the past—he burst into the office and handed Jordan White his card:

THE CHAUNCEY-KING COMPANY-

Manufacturers of

Crandall's Glass-Woven Hosiery.

Factory: Newark, New Jersey.

Offices: 21360 Broadway, New York City.

And if you will take the trouble to look into their rating, you will be somewhat surprised at the high standing of the Chauncey-King Company.

All of which goes to show that sometimes a fool rushes in — and comes out a millionaire.

A LOVER AND HIS LASS.

If I were a prince on a golden throne,
And you were a lowly maid,
And you passed my way
On a summer's day,
With a glance from your eyes' deep shade,
I know, sweetheart,
With a sudden start,
My heart would bound to its own,
And I'd kneel at your feet
And bid you, sweet,
To come and share my throne.

If you were a queen and I, ah me!
Were only a minstrel, dear,
Who wandered forth
From south to north,
With spring, in the youth of the year;
If you heard my voice,
Would your heart rejoice?
Would you come with a lover's plea?
Would you bid me share
Your kingdom there,
And hold your heart in fee?

William Wallace Whitelock.

A Golden Grave

by Allan Stephens

A COMPLETE NOVEL.

CHAPTER I.

THE GREEN PACKAGE.

IT was a warm evening in June, and some New Yorkers who had turned a deaf ear to the siren call of Coney Island and Rockaway sat upon their doorsteps, shirt-sleeved. Others gathered at the corner cafés and listened gladly to the hiss of the siphon; while wives and daughters filtered through the avenues and fringed the soda-fountains.

In an Eighth Avenue drug-store not far from Columbus Circle, and known as Devine's, the proprietor seemed far from being pleased by the crowd before his soda-fountain. His clerk had been dismissed for the night, and as the owner himself scowlingly mixed phosphates and flavors of all descriptions, an observant onlooker might have wondered why the rush of business seemed to displease the druggist.

As the hands of the clock, which hung over a show-case filled with toilet articles, crept closer to the hour of eleven, the man in the alpaca coat glanced impatiently at the time; and as the hour hand fairly covered the mark, he hastened to close and lock the front doors of the establishment.

A boy rattled the door and waved a prescription at the druggist, but he paid no heed to the youth and turned down the lights in the front of the store.

Retiring behind the opaque glass shielding the prescription-counter, he took a seat upon a stool, and producing a long black cigar, felt aimlessly in his vest-pocket for a match. Not finding what he sought, he laid the cigar upon the desk before him; and taking an envelope from an inner pocket he withdrew its contents, and unmindful of the fact that he wanted to smoke, studied the closely written sheet for fully a half hour.

Its contents thoroughly mastered, he tore the envelope and paper into shreds, and after placing them into an earthen mortar at his elbow, set fire to them by means of a paper spill ignited at the gas-jet over his head.

Grinding the resulting ashes beneath his heel, he mechanically placed the unlighted cigar in his mouth, and then stared at the rows of jars and bottles before him.

Taking down a wide-mouthed, closely stoppered bottle from the shelf, he was on the point of emptying a portion of its contents onto a sheet of paper, when he hesitated. The perspiration gathered upon his temples and wrists. His hands trembled at his thoughts, and then slowly—very slowly—replaced the bottle upon the shelf.

Glancing nervously around the store, as if afraid of being overseen, the druggist then pondered a while, and finally took down another bottle, much smaller than the first. Pouring several ounces of its powdered contents into a pasteboard box, he wrapped the latter up in a sheet of heavy green paper, and tied and sealed it securely.

After addressing and stamping the green package, he boarded a trolley-car and rode fully two miles before descending; and after dropping the package into a letter-box on an unfrequented corner, he walked rapidly away from the vicinity until he reached a saloon.

Entering the saloon, he called for brandy and helped himself liberally with fingers that shook in spite of his efforts at self-control. He tossed a coin to the man and then, somewhat steadied by the stimulant, walked to his lodgings, where he lay awake until the clattering milk and bread wagons warned him that another day was at hand.

That day saw Devine's drug-store closed to the public; but behind the locked doors the proprietor and another man busied themselves until far into the night, taking account of stock and adjusting other matters.

The following day, a dray drew up at the door of the Eighth Avenue establishment, and the stock was loaded into it. Another dray followed, and the fixtures were carted off. While the real-estate agent was placing a placard in the window, which read "To Let," Devine was at his bank, withdrawing his entire balance, and an hour later was speeding west with funds amounting to nearly fifteen thousand dollars upon his person.

His ticket read from New York to Seattle, but before paying for it, he had been assured by the agent that he was entitled to stop over at Detroit and Chicago for any period of time less than five days. Devine had urgent business to transact in both cities, and long before Detroit was reached had familiarized himself with certain train schedules, and had noted the proposed sailings of several steamships from Seattle and Vancouver.

The wheels of the express had hardly ceased turning at Detroit before Devine sprang from the steps of the sleeper and entered a cab. Driving to the offices of a well-known firm of boat-builders, he dismissed the cab and entered the salesroom.

"I want to see a good motor-boat," he said to a salesman who approached him. "Something that is fast; that don't draw too much water; and has a cabin in her that two or three people can cook and sleep in."

The salesman scratched his head with the end of a lead pencil, and then led the way down an aisle between rows of sample boats of every description. Pausing before a twenty-footer with a miniature cabin in her forward end nearly flush with the deck, he informed Devine that the boat had berths for two, that there was ample space to install a locker and kerosene-stove, and that she was guaranteed to cover a measured mile in a little better than four minutes. The price, he added, was nine hundred and fifty dollars, f.o.b.

"Show me something about twice as big, that can go twice as fast," was Devine's reply as he turned away from the little craft.

"Of course we have larger and faster ones, sir," said the salesman, "but—" he hesitated as he surveyed the prospective customer. Devine's appearance was far from that of a wealthy purchaser of fast pleasure craft. He finally continued, "You see, every foot in length, and every mile per hour of additional speed, nearly doubles the cost."

"Show me what I want and then we'll talk about the cost," directed Devine, as he tapped his breast-pocket significantly.

The salesman took the hint, and led the way to the front of the room. Propped up upon chocks, in front of one of the large plate-glass show windows, Devine saw a long, shallow boat. She had fine lines, and had evidently been built with an eye for speed rather than for seaworthiness.

"How fast can this boat go?" asked Devine, as he touched the polished sides of the racer.

"She ought to do nearly thirty, sir," answered the salesman. "Her mate, with the same hull and engines, beat everything on the lakes last fall. She'll sleep four people in that hunting cabin of hers, and there's hardly anything afloat that can pass you. She'd not be on the floor now at this time of the year but for a Milwaukee party that put up a deposit on her. We've held her for him nearly ninety days, and I've been instructed to sell her."

"Can one man run the engine and steer her if needs be?" inquired Devine, who had climbed aboard, and was peering into the cabin.

"That's the beauty of her," declared the clerk, as he followed Devine. "The engine's a forty-horse, four-cycle; but we've got these marine engines down so fine nowadays that they're practically fool-proof. All she needs is gasoline and lubricating oil. Keep the tanks full and the spark plugs clean and she'll run until the engine wears out."

"How many miles will she cover in smooth salt water with one filling of the gasoline tank?" asked Devine.

"She ought to cover about three hundred miles, figuring her consumption at a little less than a pint per horse-power per hour," was the reply, after a moment's calculating.

"Could you put two extra tanks in her, one along each side of her keel, so that I could get at least a thousand miles out of her without having to stop for want of gasoline?" was the next query.

"We'll have to see one of the designers about that; I dare say that it can be arranged. Step this way, and I'll make inquiry."

Devine followed the man to an inner office, and after waiting a few minutes was informed that the tanks could be put in and connected if he would pay extra for their installation.

"How much will the whole shooting match amount to?" asked the ex-druggist.

"The launch will cost you seven thousand five hundred dollars net, and the extra tanks will come to about a hundred apiece," the salesman replied, after a brief conference with the designer.

Devine glanced around the inner office, and then produced a bill-book from his breast-pocket. Taking from it a packet of bank-notes of large denomination, he counted out a sum of money and replaced the balance in his pocket.

"There's eight thousand dollars," said he as he passed the money to the salesman. "I want you to get that boat into the lake here by two o'clock this afternoon. If you start now, you can do it. Send one of your best demonstrators to me to explain the working of the boat, and he'll spend the afternoon with me on the water at my expense. After we return to the dock, I want you to haul out the boat and put a gang of men at work on the tanks. Let 'em work day and night until she's ready, and then crate her up on a flat car and ship her to me at Seattle by fast freight. Put a case under her flooring containing some extras and duplicate parts. I'll have the demonstrator prepare a list after I've had a talk with him. If the eight thousand dollars don't cover the entire expense, wire me at the Rainier-Grand in Seattle and I'll wire you the difference."

"What's the name, sir?" asked the salesman when he had verified the amount and taken out an order pad.

"Wilson—James T. Wilson," answered Devine, without hesitation.

The salesman prepared a receipt for the money, and after Devine received some instructions in detail relating to the draft of the launch, and the exact capacity of the proposed tanks, he left the office and inquired for the nearest branch of the public library.

After an hour spent in poring over an atlas and doing some figuring, he proceeded to a telegraph office and sent a despatch as follows:

FRANK MOORE,
Dawson City, Y. T.

Mailed you package. Am on way. Make it last trip just below Nulato. Will see you at Mission about September first as per your schedule.
JIMMIE.

That afternoon Devine received his lesson on the waters of Lake St. Clair, and the following day found him in an outfitting house in Chicago, where he made extensive purchases before continuing on his way to Seattle. He seemed to be well contented with affairs as far as they had gone, and as he paid for a pair of the latest model of magazine revolvers, and added two dozen of large chamois-skins to his bill, he muttered to himself:

"Moore's scheme is a winner. I'll back it with my last cent, for there's a million in it at least!"

CHAPTER II.

THE PILOT IS SILENCED.

ONE of the most popular passengers on board the steamship Yosemite was the man known as James T. Wilson. He was always ready to fill a chair at one of the card-tables in the smoking-room, and none of the men spent half as much money with the wine steward as he. His speed boat, Skimmer I, lashed snugly to the port rail forward of the main-hatch, was admired by all hands, although old-timers who had wintered on the Yukon were outspoken in disapproval of its owner's plans.

A gasoline-boat was useless on the river, they declared, since for the entire distance of one thousand five hundred and forty miles between Dawson City and St. Michaels, at the mouth of the river, it would be impossible to obtain gasoline. Others asserted that no craft drawing more than thirty-six

inches of water could cross the bar at Fort Yukon, one thousand one hundred and forty miles above the delta, and Wilson had been heard to say that the Skimmer drew exactly thirty-nine inches with her tanks full.

The Yosemite was barely twenty-four hours out from Seattle before the curious ones among the passengers had learned from Wilson that he was a capitalist, bound for the Klondike district on a flying trip. When it had been intimated to him that he could have made the trip much more quickly and economically by going in by way of the railroad to White Horse, and down the Lewes River by boat, the capitalist smilingly stated that time and money were no object to him, and that he expected to combine business with pleasure.

It was his purpose to tarry a while at St. Michaels, and to ship gasoline to various points on the Yukon by the stern-wheeler Alice, which was advertised to connect with the Yosemite at St. Michaels. Furthermore, he added that he had heard that gunning was good along the river, and that if he found it impossible to get over the bar at Fort Yukon, he would turn around and have a bit of shooting on his way out of the country before the freeze-up.

He asked many questions about the mission stations along the river, and seemed to be particularly interested in Nulato, a settlement and mission about half-way between Dawson City and the salt water. Those familiar with the country were only too willing to give him the information he desired, as they found him to be liberally inclined, free with his cigars and a very companionable person indeed.

On the 5th of August, twelve days after leaving Seattle, the Yosemite dropped anchor off the harbor of St. Michaels and the passengers hastened ashore to stretch their legs. Lighters were towed alongside, and for two busy days the work of shifting a great part of the cargo to the stern-wheeler went on.

Wilson's launch was picked up by the powerful steam crane as if it were but a toy, and after its owner had seen his barrels of gasoline safely aboard the river steamer, and had given the purser directions for leaving it at certain points along the river, he took up his quarters aboard the Skimmer and made some brief trial spins around Norton Sound, guided by a half-breed pilot named Ishmak.

The storekeeper at St. Michaels warned Wilson that the season was getting late, and that if he intended trying to cross the bar at Fort Yukon he had better be on his way. The capitalist laughed, and declared that it was immaterial to him whether or not the freeze-up caught him below Dawson.

He wanted to give the Alice a good start ahead of him so that he would be sure of a supply of gasoline. He continued his trial spins around St. Michaels with his half-breed pilot, studying his engine and biding his time. He had an appointment below Nulato on the first of September, and had no desire to reach that point much before the appointed time.

The Alice was the last boat of the season to leave for Dawson City, and ten days after she whistled farewell to the little settlement at St. Michaels Wilson headed the sharp prow of the Skimmer for the delta of the Yukon, fifty miles distant.

Wilson was at the wheel. The half-breed perched himself upon the roof of the cabin, and from time to time indicated the course. As the buildings of St. Michaels faded from view, Wilson opened the throttle wider and wider until the Skimmer fairly flew over the green seas, and Ishmak gazed in amazement.

Soon the color of the water changed to a muddy yellow; then the low outlines of the coast loomed up ahead of them, and within an hour and a half after leaving St. Michaels they were slowly threading their way into the Apoon Passage, one of the several mouths of the mighty Yukon.

Ahead of them, as far as their eyes could see, stretched the monotonous flats of yellow mud and sand. Not a tree, not even a bush or a shrub was in sight. They were in the barren Delta, and no sound broke the silence save the rush of waters under the cutwater of the Skimmer and the hum of her engine.

Beside the helmsman lay an open book and a compass, and from time to time, as the course changed, he made entries in the book, consisting of the time, the direction, and the rate of speed they were traveling. There was a fair volume of water in the river-bed, therefore all Wilson had to do was to keep in the middle of the stream, with an eye peeled for snags.

The engine ran sweetly, and he had long since determined the exact amount of cylinder oil to feed it. He somewhat regretted having hired Ishmak to accompany him, since there seemed to be very little need for his services.

As the Skimmer drew out of the Delta and entered the main channel, the river grew wider and its banks higher. Occasional clumps of dwarfed willow and gnarled hemlock appeared upon either shore. As the brass marine clock in the cabin companionway indicated the hour of one by chiming two bells, Wilson throttled the engine down until the launch barely held its own against the five-mile current, and then headed for the bank.

Ishmak sprang out with a line and made her fast to a stunted willow. Wilson shut off the engine, and a few minutes later the savory smell of frying ham and eggs, which issued from the hunting cabin, indicated that the noon-day meal was well under way.

Good progress was made during the afternoon, and as the sun disappeared below the southwestern horizon the Skimmer was tied up for the night. Wilson prepared another meal, and after it had been eaten in silence, retired to the cabin to read and smoked before turning in. He closed the sliding door behind him and left Ishmak to make up his bed of furs on the floor of the open cockpit. The nights, as yet, were not excessively cold, and they could reasonably expect to have from three to four weeks more of fine weather.

Wilson lit the swinging lamp over the little table and tried to interest himself in a book. The effort was useless, as from time to time he caught himself turning page upon page with no idea of the printed contents. He shrugged his shoulders and lit a cigar. Before the weed had been fairly ignited, he permitted it to go out, and cast it from him with an oath. Examining his revolvers, he placed them beneath a pillow at the head of his berth. He then turned down the lamp a little and partly undressed himself.

Troubled by his thoughts, and fearing that some slight accident might interfere with his plans, he found it impossible to sleep. The presence on board of Ishmak disturbed him. The river was easy to navigate. He had no real need of the half-breed, and it was out of the question to have him on board when he kept his appointment below Nulato.

As yet, Ishmak knew nothing of his plans, save that they were bound up the river with no definite destination in view. He could manage to leave him ashore at one of the lower Esquimo settlements, or he could get rid of him by running away with the Skimmer while Ishmak was on the river's bank attending to some fictitious errand.

These schemes would hardly do, reflected Wilson. The half-breed would probably be able to make his way to one of the settlements if he was abandoned. If he was left openly at one of the fishing stations, it would excite curiosity. Either plan was sure to start talk, and that was the last thing that Wilson wanted at that particular time. Another way must be devised.

Several times during the night Wilson arose from his berth and opened the door giving access to the cockpit. The night was a fairly bright one. The Skimmer was tied up to the right bank of the river, and Wilson could see the dim outlines of the moss-covered tundra as it swept away northward toward the Arctic Ocean.

Looking in the other direction, he saw the faint shadow of the far shore, nearly a mile distant. The five-knot current lapped monotonously the bows of the launch; no other sound could be heard except the snore of the pilot, buried in his robes of deer and muskrat skins.

Upon his last visit to the deck, Wilson gazed for several minutes at the unconscious form of the pilot. Returning to the cabin, he turned up the lamp and looked at himself in a mirror which hung beside his berth. He shivered slightly; then opening a locker, he took out a leather-covered flask. Without troubling to get himself a glass, he took a long pull at the neat brandy, and then turned down the lamp and threw himself upon his berth.

When he awoke in the morning, the sun was shining brightly, and the pilot was brushing the hoar-frost from the seats and flooring of the cockpit. Breakfast was prepared, and then the engine oiled and groomed for another day's run. Wilson turned his motor over as Ishmak cast off the line to the bank, and as the half-breed gained the deck, the engine was purring smoothly. Switching over his ignition from the storage batteries to the magneto, Wilson opened the throttle and the Skimmer forged ahead.

The wretched huts of Andreafski appeared an hour later, but as Wilson had no business to transact there, he continued up-stream at full speed, merely waving his hand to a group of half-starved Tinnehs who gazed open-mouthed at the Skimmer as it raced by. Such a wonderful craft had never before been seen on the river.

Ikogmut was reached about four o'clock, and as Wilson learned that the Holy Cross Mission was but fifty miles farther on, he decided to continue, as there was both gasoline and a taste of civilization awaiting him at the mission. He was not disappointed either, for as he tied up at the little dock at Holy Cross, a kindly priest bade him welcome, and informed him that the Alice had left two barrels of gasoline there for him some days since.

Wilson had time to visit the wonderful garden and chapel of logs before dark, and after a hearty supper, he had a long chat with the priest, who had many questions to ask about affairs of the world outside. Refusing a bunk in the guest cabin, Wilson returned to the Skimmer and passed the night.

Early the next morning he roused Ishmak, and with the assistance of two of the native converts, rolled the barrels of gasoline to the head of the dock, and filled his tanks. He had figured well, for after filling both of the auxiliary tanks which he had drawn upon alternately in order to preserve an even keel, barely a gallon of fuel was left in the second barrel.

Waving a farewell to the priest, he ordered Ishmak to cast off, and a few minutes later a bend in the river hid the station from view. He meant to reach Nulato, two hundred and twenty miles above, by nightfall; and as the land grew higher and the river narrower, the current became stronger, and it became necessary for him to press the engine almost to its limit.

A brief halt was made at midday for coffee and food; and as the afternoon wore on and the sun sank lower and lower, Wilson watched the pilot narrowly, and finally ordered him to stand up on the roof of the cabin to see whether he could make out any of the buildings at Nulato.

The fishing station of Kaltag had been passed an hour since, and Wilson felt that Nulato could not be many miles away. The Indian took up his station on the prow of the launch. Steadying himself by placing one hand upon the gilt ball at the top of the burgee staff, he shaded his eyes with his other hand and gazed to the north.

"Can't see Nulato," said the half-breed, after a moment. "I think about ten miles more. 'Round next bend she come."

"You stay up there till I tell you to come down," ordered Wilson sharply.

Something in the tone caused Ishmak to look behind him. Wilson was sweeping the horizon with his field glasses, pausing every few moments to see that the Skimmer was keeping to her course. Not a living thing was in sight. Wondering why his employer had spoken sharply to him, and why he had not handed him the field-glasses, Ishmak continued his lookout to the northward.

Wilson laid the glasses aside, and felt in the side-pocket of his leather shooting-jacket. Slowly withdrawing his hand from the pocket, it disclosed the wicked-looking automatic. Another hasty glance behind and around him, and then Wilson leveled the repeater at the half-breed. Glancing along its blued steel sights, he selected a spot midway between the shoulders of the pilot, and then pressed the trigger hard.

A series of sharp reports split the air, as Wilson kept the trigger pressed back, and ten steel-jacketed bullets tore their way through the body of the pilot quicker than the telling of it. Ishmak straightened to his full height without relaxing his grasp upon the staff.

For a fraction of a second he stiffened; then his body, still erect and unyielding, toppled into the Yukon, as a tree falls under the woodman's ax, carrying with it a piece of the staff, which had broken off at the socket, when the guide's hand still held it fast. His body came to the surface in a short time at least a hundred feet astern of the Skimmer.

As Wilson looked behind him, wide-eyed and ghastly white, he saw an arm and hand appear above the yellow flood. The gilt ball at the end of the broken staff, still clutched by the gripped hand of the pilot, glinted an instant in the rays of the setting sun, and then slowly sank from view.

Ishmak had been silenced forever.

CHAPTER III.

THE STOWAWAY.

"ANY mail for Frank Moore?" inquired an ill-favored individual, as he entered the two-storied edifice of logs which served Dawson City as a post-office. A mail had arrived that morning by way of Skagway, and he had impatiently taken his place near the foot of the long line which formed.

The clerk reached into one of the pigeonholes behind him, and after fumbling over a bunch of letters, shook his head and looked at the man behind him.

"Maybe you've got a package for me, then," insisted the man at the window, without budging from his position.

The clerk looked upon a bench at his elbow. It was cluttered up with a heap of packages of various sizes. Pawing them over, he looked at their superscriptions until he came across a small parcel wrapped in green paper. Sliding it across the window-ledge, he then gave his attention to the next man in line.

Moore grasped the green package, and after a glance at the postmark, placed it in his pocket and left the building. Climbing the stairs to his lodgings in First Avenue, he placed the parcel, without opening it, at the bottom of a telescope valise. He then returned to the kitchen of the Aurora in Front Street, an establishment given over to eating, drinking, dancing, and gambling.

It ranked third in point of size to the Dawson City devotees of the three latter amusements, but in so far as its restaurant was concerned, Dawson could not boast of anything better. Moore was the chef, and no appetizing dish was too difficult for him to prepare. The *bon-vivants* of the Klondike were proud of him, and with good reason.

Doffing his street garb, Moore donned a white apron and cap, and went about his duties. With his thoughts on other matters, it was not surprising that the patrons of the restaurant had reason to complain of the dinner that evening. The bouillon was not up to the mark, and the *patés* of chicken were scorched. The proprietor forbore to complain, however, as good cooks were still scarce in Dawson, and Moore was possessed of a sullen temper.

The river steamer Bella was due at Dawson in the latter part of August, and its chef was to take Moore's place for the winter. Arrangements had been made for Moore to act as cook on the Bella's last trip down the river as far as St. Michaels, where she was to winter. He would then proceed to San Francisco or Seattle by ocean steamer, and come in the following spring by the way of Skagway. Moore's employer reflected that there was no use in finding fault. August was only a few weeks ahead.

As the long days of the brief summer wore away, Moore began to concern himself less and less with the culinary doings in the Aurora. He left the cooking mostly to his assistants, and absent-mindedly superintended the preparations of dishes especially ordered. His thoughts were far away. At last he saw himself on the "outside" with a large sum of money to spend.

His scheme, the fruit of a year of thought, was a good one. He would soon be through forever with unventilated kitchens and scorching ranges. He would be a gentleman. A score of servants would wait upon him. He pictured the white lights of New York; the theaters and the race-track.

He scanned the columns of Dawson's daily paper closely, on the lookout for news from down the river; and one evening in early August, as the days were growing shorter, he noted a telegraphic despatch from St. Michaels via the military telegraph line, announcing the departure of the Bella.

A day or two later, he read of the arrival at St. Michaels of the Yosemite, and the subsequent sailing of the Alice. In due time he read of an adventurous American capitalist who had started to ascend the Yukon in a forty-foot motor-boat.

Thereafter, until the Alice had arrived and departed, and the whistle of the Bella notified the residents of Dawson that the last "down-boat" of the season had arrived, Moore became a changed man. He began to frequent the gaming tables of the Aurora. Roulette and faro made a hole in his savings, and what was left of them found its way into the till of the dance-room, where dances and drinks were "four bits" each.

The evening of August 27 found him on board the Bella. He had scarcely a hundred dollars to show for his two winters at Dawson, but he had his telescope valise with him, was assured of a passage down the river in the capacity of cook, and knew that if his plans went smoothly he would soon be rich. All that night, men were busily employed in unloading the river steamer. The following forenoon, some freight for Fort Yukon and Rampart City was trundled aboard, followed by a bare half-dozen passengers, who preferred the all-water route.

Promptly at noon on the 28th, a day

later than her schedule called for, Captain Dunn pulled the whistle-cord of the Bella, lines were cast off, the gang-plank hauled in, and the Bella steamed rapidly down the river. With the aid of the current, the stern-wheeler was able to travel about sixteen miles an hour. Four hours later, the international line was passed, and a short stop made at Eagle, where two disgusted "cheechakas," with barely enough money left to pay their passage, were taken aboard.

As the forests of birch and fir below Seventy Mile swept by, Moore had supper ready, and after a stop for wood, the Bella continued on her way until the sun sank behind the granite cliffs, and it grew too dark to proceed with safety. Making for the bank, Captain Dunn tied up for the night, while Moore changed his clothing and entered the smoking-room for a chat with the passengers.

A game of poker was in progress at one of the round tables. At another, with a bottle of Scotch between them, two old "sour-doughs" were talking of the famine of 1897. The two tenderfoots listened respectfully, and thanked their stars that an opportunity of getting out of that awful country before the freeze-up had been offered. Then the conversation took a turn along technical lines; and after listening for an hour to an animated discussion as to the proper pitch for setting sluice-boxes and the right depth for flour-gold riffles, Moore left them.

Before retiring, he stopped at the galley to look after two salmon-berry pies which he had baked for himself. He had removed them from the oven about an hour before and placed them on a table before the large potato-bin opening into the galley. The door had a spring-lock, and Moore carried the only key. The pies were gone—plates and all. Blaming the theft upon some member of the crew, who had managed to fish them out through the window, Moore sought his berth.

Circle City was reached the following forenoon, and an undesirable former resident of Dawson was invited to step ashore. The commandant of the Northwest mounted police had given him his choice between the wood-pile and deportation.

A small quantity of freight was borne ashore, and the Bella was off again. Below Circle City, the Yukon broadened out in the flat country. The water grew shallower, and the current decreased, but in spite of the disadvantage, Captain Dunn made Fort Yukon by dark, having passed the Alice on her way up.

The next night was spent at a wood station above Rampart City. The mouth of the Tanana was passed on the day following, and Moore, unable to sleep, smoked nearly all night. Late in the afternoon Captain Dunn stopped at Nulato.

A few barrels of fish-oil were rolled aboard the Bella, followed by a priest with some mail. Moore noted the graceful outlines of a motor-boat tied up at the little dock close at hand, and a few moments later its owner boarded the Bella and bought a pound of cotton waste from the engineer.

"I had a pretty tough trip up," Moore heard him say to the captain. "My pilot fell overboard just below here, and since my arrival at Nulato, my engine hasn't been working right. It's all right now, though; but it's too late for me to think of getting any farther up the river. Guess I'll leave for St. Michaels this afternoon or in the morning and get out of the country before the ice catches me."

Looking out of the galley doorway as the owner of the motor-boat started for the gangway, Moore looked the man straight in the face. The visitor glanced carelessly at the man in the white cap, but if they had ever met before no one was the wiser. An observant onlooker might, however, have detected the right eyelid of the cook droop slightly as the other passed.

A few minutes later the Bella had dropped down stream, and was out of sight around the bend. Captain Dunn was anxious to reach the next wood-pile before dark, and the passengers were given to understand that it was situated a few miles below Kaltag, forty miles distant.

Moore was preparing supper by the time the wood-piles hove in view. Several pans of corned-beef hash were browning in the oven of the galley range, while large pots of tea and coffee were steaming on its top.

Glancing nervously around the galley, Moore took a package wrapped in green paper from a pocket beneath his apron. Hastily unwrapping it, he sprinkled a liberal portion of its contents over the pans of hash, and divided the remainder between the pots of tea and coffee. Then casting the empty box and paper into the fire, he awaited the entrance of the steward. It

still lacked ten minutes of the regular hour for supper.

The native deck-hands made the Bella fast to the bank, and obedient to the sharp command of the captain, began their task of getting the cord-wood aboard, so that an early start could be made at daybreak.

The supper-bell rang, and the passengers filed into the deck-house, their appetites whetted by a stroll ashore in the nipping air. Platters of steaming hash were passed around the table, followed by pitchers of tea and coffee. Captain Dunn explained that the wood had been cut some distance away from the river, and hauled to the bank by dogs. The woodcutters' camp was several miles distant, and the men seldom came to the river except with wood, or when in need of supplies. He helped himself to coffee, and the meal went on.

First to feel the effects of the contents of the green package was one of the "cheechakas," a young man just out from Indiana. He was in the act of conveying a spoonful of canned peaches to his mouth when he collapsed. The spoon rattled to the floor; his nerveless arms dropped to his sides; and in another instant he had fallen over on the table, face down.

The steward sprang to his side, and with the aid of two of the passengers, bore the tenderfoot to his stateroom and laid him in his berth. By the time they returned to the supper-table, Captain Dunn, who had had his third cup of coffee, lay stretched out upon the floor, while the engineer and one of the old-timers busied themselves loosening the clothing around his neck.

In the meantime, the deck-hands and two half-breed firemen appeared at the galley door with their tin pans and cups. The cook heaped up their pans with hash, and filled their pint cups with coffee. From his post in the galley, Moore could see them as they squatted around the warm boiler in the half-open engine-room, and attacked the food. He watched and waited.

One of the crew devoured his bread and hash long before the others had finished. He swallowed his scalding coffee, and drew out his pipe and tobacco. Moore watched him closely. The man had filled his pipe, and had opened the door of the fire-box for a light when he toppled over awkwardly and fell to the iron-sheathed deck.

At the same instant Moore heard a commotion in the deck-house, and the steward rushed forth, a pitcher in his hand. He reached the galley, and was about to address Moore, when he fell writhing to the deck, for he also had sampled the coffee during his trips to and from the galley.

The crash of the pitcher seemed to arouse Moore to action. Stepping over the unconscious body of the steward, he rushed to the deck-house, and entered. A terrible sight met his gaze. Strewn around the table, lying just as they had fallen, he saw the insensible forms of his victims. But one passenger was missing. Surmising that he had been carried to his stateroom, Moore pushed open the door, and saw that he had been placed in his berth.

Making his way back to the galley, Moore perceived that his plans had been successful as far as the crew was concerned, for he could see the motionless shapes upon the floor of the engine-room. The door of the fire-box was open, and the dying flames lit up the compartment, causing ghastly shadows.

"Hope they all sleep till Jimmie gets here," said Moore to himself. Opening a locker, he was about to help himself to whisky, when something bumped the Bella gently and a voice cried, "Wake up and take a line here!"

A few moments later the Skimmer was tied securely to the low rail of the larger craft. Wilson then sprang aboard, and the two conspirators silently clasped hands.

"Everything all right?" asked Wilson.

"Every soul on board's doped except me," replied the cook.

"I've been following you with the Skimmer ever since you left Nulato," explained Wilson. "She ran so fast that I had to choke her down to quarter speed to keep from catching up. Tied up to the bank about two miles above here, so as to give you a chance to get in your fine work. Here—take this." Wilson slipped one of his automatics into the hand of the cook.

"You know how to work it," he went on. "It's loaded, and you may need it in case any wood-choppers butt in on us. Let's get to work now. It ain't so dark to-night but what we can load up and slip down the river a few miles. This part of the river is free from snags. Where's the stuff?"

They had been talking in front of the galley. Moore put the revolver in his side-pocket, and led the way to the deck-house. Taking a fire-ax from its socket on the wall, he paused before a closed door adjoining the captain's stateroom.

With a well-directed blow of the ax, he shattered the lock, and the door swung ajar. Pushing the door wide open, he pointed to a row of wooden boxes, each one about two feet square and strapped at the ends with iron bands.

"There's the stuff," said Moore. "Every ounce on board is in those boxes, except a few nuggets a couple of those sour-doughs layin' back there was carryin' in their pockets. There ain't as much as I thought there was going to be, but I guess it'll be about all your boat'll carry."

Wilson counted fifteen of the boxes, and raised one on end.

"Must weigh about two hundred apiece," said he. "Figuring the gold at eighteen dollars an ounce, that won't be far off a million. Maybe it'll be a little more."

"This is most all Fannie MacDonald's shipment," said Moore. "She brought in a hydraulic machine last year, and cleaned up all this stuff from the tailin's of the old Bonanza claims. She worked on a percentage, and made good. She was to have come out with it herself, as I understand it, but decided to work until the freeze-up and then go out with dogs, over the Pass."

"Come on!" suddenly exclaimed Wilson. "We'll have to get busy with this stuff and get it aboard the Skimmer. We'll put it aboard just as it is, and to-morrow, while we're slipping down the river, you can shift it into some chamois-skins I've got."

Six or seven trips had been made between the gold-room and the Skimmer when Moore became nervous.

"Suppose some of them people wake up?" he inquired. They were standing directly in front of the galley again, and the light from the large lamp shone full in Wilson's face.

"Don't let that worry you," he replied with a laugh that disclosed a gold tooth under his close-cropped black mustache. "They'll never wake up," he went on in a cold-blooded tone that made Moore shiver, hardened as he was.

"You see, after I mailed you that green package, I discovered that, instead of sending you chloral-hydrate, I had sent you quite a different article. Two grains of the powder I mailed you will put the strongest man out of business inside of five minutes. It's just as well that I made the mistake, because chloral is uncertain, anyway. I didn't grub-stake you two years ago for nothing, and it's just as well if we don't take any chances of doing another ten-stretch with a two-spot off for good behavior. Those fellows will never dig any more gold."

"Jimmie, you're a hound of Hades!" declared Moore excitedly. "It's wholesale murder, and nothing else."

"Never mind what it is," said Wilson with tightening lips. "We've got work ahead of us now. Let's get at it."

The last box had been slid down an inclined plank into the cockpit of the Skimmer. Wilson, with an eye to the shore for the possible coming of woodcutters, had trimmed the additional load of the motor-boat so that an even keel would be preserved. He then mounted to the deck of the Bella and, knocking in the heads of several barrels of fish-oil, kicked them over on their sides. A five-gallon can of kerosene was then slashed with the fire-ax, and the petroleum emptied along the wooden deck at the base of the deck-house on the shore side.

Wilson crumpled up a newspaper. Igniting it at the open door of the fire-box, he tossed it into the nearest puddle of kerosene. As the oil blazed up, he sprang to the rail on the opposite side and dropped lightly into the cockpit of the Skimmer.

"All right! Let go!" he called to Moore, who had cast off the line from the rail of the Bella, and was holding the launch in place by means of a single turn.

Moore let go the free end of the line. The Skimmer dropped silently down the river, with her bow pointed up-stream. Wilson threw on his switch, and fumbled at the starting-crank. The next instant the hum of the motor drowned the sound of the crackling flames, and as Wilson took the wheel and partly opened the throttle the Skimmer gradually acquired steerageway and was headed in the direction of St. Michaels, more than six hundred miles below.

The motor-boat had scarcely disappeared around the first bend below the wood-piles, when the slight form of a boy crept from the galley. The Bella was on fire in several different places. Even as he looked into the interior of the deck-house, a tongue of flame shivered the window-glass across from him, and showed in detail the horrible sight within.

Rushing back to the galley, the youth crawled into the potato-bin for an instant. Emerging with a roll of blankets, he found that the flames had not yet worked forward

far enough to cut off his escape to the shore. With pale face and trembling limbs, he crossed the narrow plank leading to the bank, sickened by the awful things he had heard and seen.

He had escaped just in time, for even as he sat upon his blanket-roll and buried his face in his hands, the flames ate through one of the hawsers holding the Bella to the bank. The ill-fated stern-wheeler swung to the current, snapping the other hawser, and the next instant the flaming hulk, with its ghastly freight, was drifting down the Yukon, stern first.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FLIGHT.

"I HAVEN'T the honor of being personally acquainted with this Fannie MacDonald, but I'm much obliged to her for washing out this gold for us." Wilson hit the cold-chisel a heavy blow as he spoke, and the chilled steel bit through one of the iron bands around the box before him.

The Skimmer was tied up to the bank, nearly a hundred miles below the scene of the desertion of the Bella. With Moore on the lookout for snags, and Wilson at the helm, the launch had made fair progress in spite of the reduced speed necessitated by the darkness. Promptly at sunrise Wilson had headed for the shore, and the work of transferring the gold began.

Each box was stenciled with the name of its owner, the number of ounces of gold contained; and on one corner of each lid the gold-commissioner's rubber stamp had been impressed, which indicated that the government royalty had been paid.

As fast as Wilson knocked off the lids and slashed the inner linings of zinc, Moore poured the heavy dust into the chamois-skins and tied them up securely with hempen twine, pouch-fashion. The empty packages were then cast into the river after Wilson had punched a hole in each bottom, and at a safe distance from the launch a fire was made out of the telltale lids.

"There's another little job to attend to before we go on," said Wilson, as he got out a pair of heavy wire-cutting pliers.

"What's that?" asked Moore, as he threw the last box-lid on the fire.

"I'm going to cut a piece out of that military telegraph line," replied Wilson.

A few yards back from the river's bank stretched the pair of insulated wires which connected St. Michaels with the metropolis of the Klondike. Making his way over the soggy tundra, stepping from one frosty clump of moss to another, Wilson arrived at the foot of a sickly birch.

Just above his head, and within easy reach of his pliers, the wires were strung. Smashing the glass insulators, he then clipped both wires, and cut off a substantial piece from each of them.

"There's nothing like making sure," he observed as he rejoined Moore. "We'll stop again to-morrow below Holy Cross, and cut out another section."

Coiling up the pieces of wire, he threw them into the Yukon. He then started the motor, and, as Moore gained the deck of the Skimmer after shoving her off, Wilson opened wide the throttle, and the Skimmer darted down the river like a live thing.

Faster and faster flew the launch, until Moore trembled for their safety, and besought Wilson to slow down. Knowing that speed was the chief factor in the desperate game he was playing, and realizing that every pound of gasoline consumed made the boat a degree lighter, Wilson turned a deaf ear to his companion's entreaties and pressed the engine to its limit.

Anvik flashed by about nine o'clock, and soon after the buildings of the Holy Cross Mission came abreast. Moore glanced at Wilson, but the latter shook his head.

"We've no time for visiting," he muttered through set teeth, without taking his eyes off the water ahead.

Dusk found them well below Ikogmut, where the river makes a great bend toward the northwest. They had made but one stop, which was in order to permit a hot bearing to cool, and Wilson had occupied the time by cutting another piece out of the telegraph line.

Several snags had been seen and passed. Warned by these, Wilson slowed down as the darkness increased, finally permitting the launch to drift with the current. He sounded his gasoline-tanks and ascertained that he had abundant fuel to last to St. Michaels.

Calculating that he could reach the deep-water port by the next afternoon, he headed for the bank at last; and, though no convenient tree could be found, the Skimmer was secured for the night by sinking her mushroom anchor into the frost-encrusted moss.

"What'll we connect with at St. Michaels?" asked Moore as he lit his after-dinner pipe.

"Steamers are scheduled to leave Nome every day or two for the next two weeks," replied Wilson. "They all touch at St. Michaels, and almost any of them are big enough to pick up the Skimmer with their cranes. We won't need to unload the stuff until we reach Seattle or Frisco. There's an assay office at both places where we can turn it into bills; and then for a divvy and a quick getaway to the East."

"I suppose it'll be share and share alike?" ventured Moore, as he glanced at his companion furtively.

"Well — hardly," said Wilson, after a moment's reflection. "You see, this trip stands me pretty near fifteen thousand dollars. That sum ought to be deducted before we divide."

"But I did all the dirty work," insisted Moore. "It ought to be half and half."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Wilson. "Didn't I grub-stake you two years ago to come up here? Haven't I put up every dollar I've got? And I'd let you know that I had to croak a man myself on the way up the river."

"I thought he fell overboard when the staff broke," returned Moore.

"So he did," chuckled his companion. "But he had a row of holes in him when he went to the bottom. I forgot that it was an automatic, and held the trigger back instead of pulling it once."

"It's murder just the same, whether it took ten balls or one. And look here, Jimmie—there's no use in my cryin' about it now; but I want to say that if I'd known I was poisonin' those people on the Bella instead of puttin' 'em to sleep, I'd have croaked myself before doin' it."

Wilson laughed harshly as he set an alarm-clock so that an early start could be made, and Moore sought in the locker for consolation in the shape of brandy. Several drinks of the liquor served to help him into a frame of mind which permitted him to sleep; as the sun rose, however, and Wilson busied himself with the engine, Moore's thoughts went back to the awful scene on board the Bella.

Glancing up the companionway to see that he was unobserved, he searched the locker for an unopened bottle of brandy. Finding what he sought, he stealthily drew the cork and took a stiff drink.

Rapid progress was made during the forenoon. Wilson referred to his note-book from time to time as they approached the mouth of the river, as the channels leading to the different mouths were numerous and bewildering. Remembering Ishmak's instructions, he kept to the right, and at noon they were well into the Apoon Passage.

Moore went below to prepare coffee and sandwiches. He had made several trips to the cabin during the forenoon, ostensibly for drinking water. As he staggered when he approached Wilson with a cup of coffee, the latter noticed it and spoke sharply to him.

"Moore, you've been drinking."

"I did have a nip this morning. What of it?"

"You want to cut it out until we're out of the woods; that's all. We've got plenty of work ahead of us to-day, and we need clear heads and steady hands."

Moore shrugged his shoulders and perched himself upon the roof of the cabin. Wilson reduced speed as the mouth drew near, for the water had grown shallower and the channel narrower. As the Skimmer neared the sea, and the helmsman headed northeast toward St. Michaels, the launch shivered several times as her keel touched bars of silt and mud.

As the color of the water gradually changed from a dirty yellow to a muddy green, the Skimmer commenced to roll slightly.

"Better come down off your perch!" shouted Wilson to Moore. "We don't need a double lookout now; and you're liable to fall overboard."

Moore, half stupefied by liquor, rose to his feet and was about to step onto the coaming that ran fore and aft along the sides of the cockpit, when the Skimmer rolled slightly to port and the reeling man fell into the sea with a splash.

Wilson was on the point of spinning his wheel hard over and circling around to the cook's assistance, when a thought stayed his hands. He did not really need Moore now. St. Michaels was less than fifty miles away, and the water was fairly smooth. No one knew Moore was on board the Skimmer. Besides, Moore was the only person who could testify against him in case of any trouble. With Moore out of the way, he would be absolutely safe; and not only that —but he would have the gold all to himself.

Opening the throttle wider, Wilson left Moore to his fate. The nearest point of the

shore was nearly a mile distant, and he knew that Moore could not swim. The wind was from the northeast, cool and penetrating; and, after the first startled cry for help, Wilson heard no more. Without casting a glance behind, he kept on his course. Another possible witness had been silenced.

On over the shallow waters of Norton Sound sped the Skimmer, until at last the island of St. Michaels appeared on the horizon. Flocks of wild duck and geese on their annual migration south flew over the launch, going in an opposite direction. Finally Wilson was able to make out the outlines of the buildings on the island; a look through his binoculars disclosed two steamships at anchor some distance offshore.

Two hours or so yet remained before sunset. Wilson was confident of obtaining a passage upon one of them. Even if he had to wait over a few days at St. Michaels, he was in no danger, as it would be a matter of weeks before the news of the disappearance of the Bella could reach the outside world. Winter was already setting in along the upper part of the Yukon. In all probability the telegraph line would not be repaired until the following spring.

The blackened hulk of the Bella would remain fast in the ice until summer, when fools would come to the spot and dredge the bed of the river for the boxes of gold. The breaks in the telegraph line would be attributed to wire-thieving natives, and the burning of the Bella, with all hands on board, would remain a mystery. Maybe, if the gold was found to be missing, the woodchoppers below Nulato would be blamed for it.

Wilson laughed at his thoughts, and looked through his binoculars again. He could now make out the color of the vessels ahead of him. One was painted white, and had trim lines. A flat-bottomed sternwheeler of small size was made fast to her. The other steamer was larger, and her black sides, high out of the water, indicated that she was carrying very little cargo, if any. From her single funnel a column of black smoke rose a few feet, until the wind dispersed it in Wilson's direction.

As the launch ate up the distance between them, Wilson laid aside his glasses, and headed for the larger vessel. As he drew closer to her he could see that she was riding on a short cable, and that the blue peter was displayed at her truck. Evidently, she was on the point of sailing.

Even as Wilson perceived the blue flag with its white square, a spurt of white vapor shot up alongside the funnel of the steamship, and a few seconds later the wail of her siren was borne to his ears.

Opening up the throttle to the last notch, Wilson covered the last half-mile, and then shut off his power as he shot up under the quarter of the steamship. A red-faced man in a uniform cap stood at the end of the bridge, directing operations.

"Where are you bound, captain?" hailed Wilson, making a speaking trumpet out of his hands, so that his voice might be heard above the clatter of the steam-windlass.

"Victoria," came the reply in a sturdy voice.

"Can you take us with you?" shouted Wilson, pointing first at himself and then at the Skimmer.

"'Vast heavin'!" roared the commander to the man at the windlass. The noise ceased as the Skimmer rubbed sides with the larger vessel.

"I'll pay you whatever it's worth," urged Wilson, craning his neck to speak to the man above him.

"Can take you all right, but couldn't say about your boat. It's quite a job to sling her aboard, and I oughter've sailed this mornin'. What are those ring-bolts for and aft bolted to?"

"They're welded into inch and a half wrought-iron bolts that run through to the keel. All you've got to do is to hook on and hoist her aboard without slings. I'll pay you for waiting."

The captain meditated a few moments, and then spat into the sea. Here was a chance for him to add to his commissions.

"Take you both down for five hundred!" he finally roared, fully expecting to be beaten down a hundred dollars or so.

"That goes!" called Wilson, as he shut off his engine and threw up a line.

A pair of seamen clambered down the side of the steamship and took charge. The ponderous cargo crane was swung outboard. Cables of hemp were lowered and attached to the ring-bolts, and inside of ten minutes the Skimmer was hoisted over the rail of the steamship, lowered to the deck, and the work of lashing her in position commenced.

At the request of the captain, Wilson emptied the gasoline-tanks of the launch, and then removed some of his personal effects to the stateroom which he was to occupy. He would have preferred to sleep

aboard the Skimmer during the voyage, so that he could keep guard over the gold; but as he reflected that such a course would arouse suspicion, he contented himself by locking the cabin door.

Proceeding to the deck, after stowing away his belongings, Wilson was surrounded by a group of refugees from Nome, who were eager for news from the upper Yukon.

"Did you see anything of the Bella?" asked the purser. "The operator ashore says he hasn't been able to work the wire for three days."

"Passed her at Nulato on the evening of the 1st," said Wilson. "Everybody on board was well, as far as I know, and she ought to be down in another week. My boat is about three times at speedy as the Bella."

After learning that Wilson had gone no farther up than Nulato, and knew little or nothing about affairs at Dawson, the crowd melted away from him, and he was able to ask a question or two himself.

He soon learned that he was on board the tramp steamship Wanderer, and that he could reasonably expect to be set down at Victoria within ten days. The white steamer a mile distant was the United States revenue cutter Bear, he was informed, and the stern-wheeler at her side had been constructed for a party of government scientists who were to leave for the Yukon the following morning. They expected to reach Nulato before the river froze; and were to explore and chart the Koyukuk River the following summer.

An hour later the outlines of St. Michaels faded in the distance, and the sun sank below the smoky waters of the Bering Sea. Wilson was elated at his success; and to celebrate the accomplishment of the greater part of the task opened several bottles of wine at the supper-table. He was voted to be a good fellow by all on board. He tipped the crew liberally, and suggested that an extra lashing be fixed around his launch.

A stop for mail at Unalaska, in the Aleutians; a halt or two at canning stations along one of the inside passages, where the slab huts of the Siwashes are backed by enormous pines shooting up hundreds of feet into the air, and fronted by grotesque totem poles; and then the Wanderer entered the quiet waters of Queen Charlotte Sound.

Victoria was reached at daybreak one morning; and after being warped into her dock, Wilson held a brief parley with the Dominion customs officials. Agreeing to leave for Seattle at once he was given to understand that the Skimmer would not be searched nor subjected to any duty. Thereupon Wilson swallowed a hasty breakfast at the Queen's Hotel and engaged a pilot for the trip across Puget Sound. The Skimmer was lowered into the water, and a supply of gasoline put into her tanks.

As the whistles of Seattle were notifying its residents that the hour of noon was at hand, Wilson was making the Skimmer fast to a stanchion of a pier at the waterside. No customs officers appeared; nor did he fear them in the event that they should show up, for the Skimmer was built at Detroit, he was a citizen of the United States, and if he had gold aboard the launch, that was his own affair.

Despatching the pilot to the office of the Wells, Fargo Express Company for a covered wagon and two armed guards, he awaited their arrival. The mammoth pouches of chamois were then loaded into the wagon and conveyed to the government assay office.

Taking his receipt, after offering the official in charge a bonus for a quick assay, he paid and discharged the pilot. He then hunted up a ship broker, and made a quick cash deal for the launch. These matters attended to, Wilson sought a hotel, and, after scarcely taking his dinner, passed a sleepless night.

The next day he haunted the vicinity of the assay office, making hourly inquiries regarding his gold. Shortly after one o'clock he received his vouchers, and, accompanied by one of the officials, proceeded to the Sub-Treasury, where a large package of notes of large denomination, aggregating over eight hundred thousand dollars, was finally handed him.

Placing the bank-notes in his traveling bag, he then made his way to the Southern Pacific ticket-office, followed by two reporters who had learned of the consignment of gold and wanted the particulars for their papers.

Wilson purchased a ticket for Los Angeles, and after promising to meet the reporters at the depot fifteen minutes before train-time, summoned an automobile, and asked to be driven to the Great Northern Hotel. The chauffeur had no sooner turned the first corner than Wilson tapped him on the back and called a halt.

"I've changed my mind," said he. "Take

me to the pier where the Sound steamer leaves. I believe I've got time to catch the afternoon boat to Victoria."

Arriving at the pier, he handed the chauffeur a ten-dollar bank-note. The man glanced at his watch, and then felt in his pocket.

"Never mind the change," chuckled Wilson. "But I'm going to ask you one thing. When those newspaper boys ask you where you took me, tell 'em that I changed my mind, and had you drive me to the Rainier-Grand Hotel."

The chauffeur nodded and winked. Wilson boarded the Puget Sound packet, and late that night connected with the eastbound Canadian Pacific express at Vancouver. Tearing into small bits his Los Angeles ticket, he tossed them out of the window of his stateroom.

He placed his bag beneath the head of the mattress of the comfortable berth, and then retired. He smiled as he thought of his successful coup; and as he fell asleep the click of the wheels over the rails seemed to say:

"Got it all! Got it all! Got it all!"

CHAPTER V.

JANE MARTIN'S DINNER-PARTY.

"JANE, you're the most curious woman I've ever met," observed a dark, smooth-faced man in evening clothes, addressing his companion across the dinner-table.

"What do you mean, John?" returned his *vis-à-vis*, smiling at him with frank pleasantry.

"Why, one never knows what to make of you. I've proposed marriage to you at least a dozen times since I met you last January, and you laugh at me. Yet you always seem anxious to be with me, and admit that you are very fond of me. Why not say yes?"

The gray eyes of the woman fell under the steady gaze of his brown ones. She fumbled with her olive fork, and bit off a piece from a stalk of celery before replying.

"I am very fond of you, John," she breathed at last. "But just think of it—we've known each other scarcely two months. It's not fair to press a girl so. You've dined me, wined me, and almost theatered me, and, really, you've been very kind; but I don't want you to think just because you have money I've got to say yes. I have means of my own. I'd like to make up my mind. Suppose I give you an answer next week?"

"I suppose I'll have to wait," agreed the other.

"Father's been dead about two years," went on his companion. "The estate was somewhat mixed up, and I'm expecting my agents to reach New York almost any day now with a report. Then I'll know just how I stand, and can give you an answer."

Dinner over, the couple donned their wraps and were driven to the opera. A light supper followed; then they separated, after agreeing to see each other on the morrow.

The next morning, as Beardsley was sitting in the lobby of his hotel, gazing moodily out of the window at the slippery asphalt of the avenue, a page approached him.

"Miss Martin is in her apartment, and wishes to speak to Mr. Beardsley over the phone, sir."

Entering the booth, he learned that her agents had reached town, and that she had arranged to give a little dinner-party in her apartment in their honor. A few friends were to be present. It was possible that she might be in a position to answer his question definitely after dinner. It had been arranged for that evening at eight o'clock. Would he come?

Thanking her, and assuring her that he would be on hand, Beardsley hung up the receiver and left the booth, his spirits high with hope. It was a chilly day in early March; still too raw to ride in the park with any degree of comfort. Entering the tap-room, he was served with Scotch and soda; after which he gave his attention to billiards until late in the afternoon, meanwhile his mind running riot over his coming happiness.

As the hands of the silver-mounted traveling clock on his dressing-table indicated the hour of eight, Beardsley looked at himself in a pier-glass near the entrance to his suite. Satisfied with his reflection, he closed the door behind him and took the elevator to Miss Martin's floor.

A colored maid took his hat and stick, and presently he found himself seated opposite Jane Martin, and between two persons who were introduced as her trusted agents. The gentleman at her right was introduced as an old friend from Montana; while at her left a bashful youth kept his eyes on

his plate while she introduced him to Beardsley as her little friend and protégé.

"You're rather late, John," smiled his hostess, looking at the clock behind her, which indicated half past eight.

"I fancy your clock is fast," said he.

Beardsley noticed that covers were laid for ten persons. He forebore to ask questions, for the serving of dinner had commenced, and no one seemed to have anything to say. Wondering who the four absent guests could be, he addressed himself to the food before him.

Course followed course, until the coffee period arrived, and all through the dinner a feeling of restraint seemed to possess the guests. Beardsley spoke to the man on his right once or twice between courses, but was answered in monosyllables. He fancied that he caught Jane looking at him several times with an unusual expression in her eyes; but as coffee was served, some color appeared in her cheeks, her eyes sparkled, and she declared that it had been a very stupid party.

"I order every one of you to either sing a song, tell a story, or do a step-dance," she commanded brightly. Tapping the man on her right on the shoulder with a dainty forefinger, she bade him commence.

"I'm very poor at story-telling," he began. "I've traveled quite a bit in my life, and ought to be able to tell a good story; but I can't. It might interest you all, however, if I told you something about a flying trip that I made last fall and winter to Alaska and return. I took some very interesting pictures that I happen to have with me; and while I'm telling my little story, you all might like to look at them."

He ceased speaking. Reaching into his breast-pocket, he produced a small portfolio of prints, which he handed to the man on Beardsley's left. The speaker then went on:

"I'm a surveyor by profession, and accompanied a government party to the Yukon country last fall for the purpose of mapping some of the unexplored territory. I fully expected to be gone for a year or two, when a series of events occurred which hastened my return. We took our provisions from a revenue cutter at the mouth of the Yukon, and started on our journey up the river on a small stern-wheel steamer, intending to get as far up as possible before the water should freeze.

"Our first stop was at a little fishing village named Kutlik, just across the Sound from the island of St. Michaels. There we took on board a native pilot and a sick man suffering from pneumonia. We proceeded up the river a short distance until darkness came on, and then tied up to the bank for the night. When the sun rose the next morning, one of the men aboard our steamer noticed a human body stranded on a sand-bar just ahead of us. One of our members photographed it just as it lay. We carried it to the bank of the river, and scooped out a grave under the moss.

"The right hand of the corpse clutched a stick or staff of some kind, to the small end of which was attached a gilt ball of wood. The body was frozen, and death had probably been caused by a number of shots from either a pistol or rifle of small caliber."

The speaker paused, and drank some water from the glass at his elbow. The portfolio was handed to Beardsley at this juncture, and as he opened it at the first picture, he gazed stolidly at the gruesome photograph.

"We had learned, just before leaving St. Michaels, that there was something wrong with the telegraph line," went on the surveyor. "The operator requested us to keep the line in view on our way up, and repair the break if possible. Some distance above the point where we buried the unfortunate—man—who, it appears, was a native—we discovered a break in the line. It had been purposely cut, and about twenty yards of each wire removed. We repaired the line, but were unable to communicate with either Dawson or St. Michaels.

"Two or three days passed without any adventure. We made good progress against the current, as we had a very powerful engine, and the hull had been constructed especially for the shallow waters of the Yukon.

"We made a brief stop at the Holy Cross Mission; then went on our way, and finally discovered another break in the line similar to the first. After splicing in two pieces of insulated wire, and cutting in our field instrument, we found ourselves in communication with both Dawson City and St. Michaels. Our telegraphic chat was a brief one, as time was flying and winter was upon us. Dawson asked us where we had passed the river steamer Bella, and seemed surprised when we replied that no steam craft had been passed, but that we had encountered several skiffs and flat-bottomed boats

drifting with the current down to the sea. Their occupants always hailed us, but usually passed by at too great a distance for conversation.

"The day following we found the Bella —or, at least, what was left of her. In rounding a bend in the river, we saw a part of a hull aground in the elbow. We were prevented from getting very close to it, as the new ice was making in the slack water around it, and the water was very shallow; but, although she had been burned almost to the water's edge, we could still make out the name on her bow. We photographed her, and went on up the river."

"What became of her passengers?" asked Beardsley, looking up from a photograph of the hulk.

"I couldn't say, personally," replied the surveyor. "But two days later, when we put in for wood about forty or fifty miles south of Nulato, we had some light thrown on the mystery. Camped alongside of the wood-piles, we found three wood-choppers with a boy in their care. He told us a story — a horrible story, almost unbelievable. We tapped the wire, and repeated it to Dawson. The authorities at that place, believing that a crime had been committed, communicated with the nearest United States marshal at Circle City. Winter caught us at Nulato, and the Yukon froze from bank to bank, making further progress by boat impossible. Under the circumstances, it was thought advisable to take the boy and the sick man to Dawson. Some one had to accompany them, and it devolved upon me.

"We waited until the snow was deep enough for travel by sled, then left Nulato with an Indian guide and the best team of dogs that the Mission could provide. We took advantage of the smooth river-ice when we were not making short-cuts across country, and after an exhausting journey, full of hardship and exposure, we reached Dawson City, having stopped at Circle City to pick up the marshal.

"We made a mid-winter journey over the Pass in record time, having wired ahead for relays of fresh dogs. In due time we reached Seattle. Believing that the man we wanted was not very far from New York, we came on here. This finishes my story, as there are others present who can speak for themselves."

Beardsley looked over the photographs representing the murdered native, the hulk of the Bella, a boy standing beside a wood-pile in the midst of a group of rough-looking men, and others of Malamute dogs, and winter travel in the Northland. He shrugged his shoulders and handed the portfolio to the man on his right.

"Some of them are horribly realistic—all of them are interesting," he commented in a low tone.

Miss Martin turned to the youth on her left. He was picking nervously at the table-cloth, and seemed to be afraid of something.

"Go ahead with your story, Frederic'" she gently urged him. "There's nothing to be afraid of."

The boy began his story in a low tone of voice, scarcely audible. He kept his eyes on his plate as he proceeded, glancing from time to time at his benefactress, who nodded her approval.

"My father's name was William Stone," he began. "Mine is Fred. We went up to Dawson two years ago after mother died. Father got sick and died too. I wasn't strong enough to work on the creeks, and often got hungry in Dawson. I had no friends after father was buried from the Jesuit Hospital, and wanted to get back to the States. It was too far to walk. I asked some of the captains to take me down the river as far as St. Michaels, but they had all the help they wanted and wouldn't take me unless I paid my fare.

"The Bella was the last boat for St. Michaels. I watched my chance to sneak on board with my blankets. I hid myself in the potato-bin at the side of the cook's galley. I ate raw potatoes and stole pies and other things when the cook locked the galley door for the night.

"A few nights after leaving Dawson I saw the cook open a package wrapped in green paper. There was some kind of powder inside of it. He put it in the hash, and in some pots on the stove. I knew it couldn't have been salt or sugar by the way he acted. Then I heard some noise a little while later outside of the gallery. The cook rushed in and was going to drink something out of a bottle, when somebody called to him.

"The cook went out on deck. Some time later he came along the deck and stopped in front of the galley-door. There was another man with him. They talked terribly. It was about poison and shooting and gold. After that they went away in a boat. I heard the flames sputtering and got my

blankets after seeing that the Bella was on fire. I saw a lot of dead people through the window of her cabin.

"I ran ashore. The boat drifted down the river, all afire. About an hour afterward the wood-choppers came to the bank and found me. They had seen the fire. Then came the government boat, and the trip to Dawson and Seattle."

Miss Martin placed her hand on the boy's shoulder and smiled at him encouragingly.

"Did you get a good look at the man who spoke to the cook?" she asked. He nooded.

"What did he look like?"

"He had a little black mustache like that man," declared the youth as he pointed across the table at the guest on Beardsley's left. "But that ain't him," he added, "'cause the man I saw had a gold tooth that showed when he laughed."

Beardsley was smiling broadly. His teeth were all white and even, and his face devoid of beard or mustache.

"This is getting interesting," said he. "Is it possible that we have this criminal in our midst?"

"It's your turn now for a story," said the hostess, nodding to the man on Beardsley's right. "Maybe you'd rather dance or sing," she added laughingly.

"Well—if I must, I will," he began. "My story will deal with the life of an unscrupulous man up to date. I'll make it brief, because we still have two more stories to hear.

"About fifteen years ago there was a man by the name of James Classon in the employ of the United States Marine Hospital Service. He was an expert chemist, and worked his way up from compounder to the superintendency of the government hospital at Baltimore, Maryland. He began to lead a fast life, and devised a scheme for defrauding the government by means of false vouchers for food and drug supplies.

"The head cook of the institution, a man by the name of Frank Moore, found out that something wrong was going on. He went to Classon and boldly demanded a share of the spoils. Classon consented under a threat of exposure, and thereafter the frauds were perpetrated on a much larger scale. Moore spent his money as fast as he received it, but the other man, realizing that the scheme could not last forever, 'planted' a sum estimated at about ten thousand dollars. They were detected, arrested, convicted, and sentenced to ten years imprisonment at Fort Leavenworth.

"At the end of eight years, having earned a commutation of two years for good behavior, they were released. Classon went to New York City and opened up a drug-store on Eighth Avenue, using the name of Devine. Moore hung around the city for a while, living on Classon's bounty, until the latter made him swear off drinking, and sent him to the Klondike with a small sum of money.

"Moore was under instructions to keep his eyes open for a chance to make a big haul, either honestly or dishonestly. He obtained a position in a Dawson City restaurant, and after his second year on the Yukon, conceived a bold scheme for drugging the passengers of a river steamer and getting away with one of the gold shipments. He wrote to Classon about it, and asked that the latter furnish him with a supply of sleeping powders of some kind, and meet him at some point along the Yukon with a speedy, light-draft launch.

"Classon mailed the drug, but not the drug that Moore expected. He sold his drug-store, assumed the name of James Wilson, and after investing in a launch, proceeded to the mouth of the Yukon. On the way up the river he shot his half-breed pilot for some reason best known to himself.

"He met the Bella at Nulato, a point about half-way between St. Michaels and Dawson. Upon the first of September he followed the Bella down stream. Moore, under the impression that he was simply drugging the passengers and crew, opened the green package and emptied its contents into the food and drink. Supper was served, and within the space of ten minutes there were but two living persons aboard the Bella: Moore himself, and a boy stowaway, whose story you have heard.

"Classon joined him, and they made their escape with nearly a million dollars' worth of gold dust, most of which was the property of a young lady named Fannie MacDonald. After setting the Bella on fire, they got to the mouth of the river, cutting the telegraph line in two places on their way. Moore, learning that he had unwittingly poisoned so many people, resorted to the brandy bottle. He became unsteady, and fell overboard about a mile from shore. Classon kept right on, heartlessly abandoning his friend."

At this juncture, Beardsley swallowed the remaining contents of his demi-tasse at a gulp. He produced a cigar from an upper vest-pocket, and after glancing at his hostess inquiringly, accepted a light from the servant behind him. The man on his left looked at Beardsley keenly as the latter felt for the cigar, and the speaker paused, ostensibly to take a sip of water.

"At St. Michaels, Classon took passage upon the steamship Wanderer. Arriving at Victoria, he crossed Puget Sound to Seattle, where he realized cash on his gold. He proceeded to Vancouver and took the Canadian Pacific express to Montreal. He then shaved off his mustache and took a train to Boston. At the Sub-Treasury in Boston he exchanged his bank-notes for ones of a smaller denomination, fearing that he might be tracked by means of the five-thousand-dollar gold certificates which he received at Seattle.

"Proceeding to New York, he rented a box in a safe-deposit vault in Pine Street, and then registered at the Holland House under the fresh alias of John B———"

The speaker never finished his sentence, for as Beardsley's right hand stole toward his vest-pocket as if in search of a match, there was a snarl of pain, and a sharp metallic click. The man on his right had grabbed his wrist and twisted it until the bones cracked. Simultaneously, the man on his left had snapped a patent hand-cuff on his left wrist. The cigar, still lit, fell from the mouth of the prisoner, and burned a hole in the table-cloth.

"People with lighted cigars don't feel for matches," observed the man on the right as he felt in Beardsley's lower vest-pocket and tossed a flat derringer upon the table.

"I'm afraid I nipped you a little, Mr. Beardsley," apologized the man on his left.

"What does all this mean?" said the trapped man hoarsely. "I'm not the man you're looking for! I was never in Alaska in my life! I have no gold tooth! You'll all pay dearly for this!"

"It's now your turn for a story," suggested Miss Martin evenly. She looked straight at Beardsley as she spoke, but something in her expression drove his face to a dead yellow.

"You can all go to the devil!" he snarled, glaring at the men on either side of him.

"My story is very short," observed the man on his left. "I'm Norton, the United States marshal from Circle City, and this man is my prisoner. I'm afraid I nipped him a little when I cuffed him, but these patent cuffs are new to me. They're quick action though."

Miss Martin whispered to the servant. He disappeared from the room for an instant and then returned with another guest.

"Sorry to be late," said the newcomer. "My name is Dr. Watson, and I'm a dentist. About two months ago this man came to my office in Boston, had a gold-capped tooth extracted, and a porcelain one put in its place. That's all there is to my story."

"Next!" called the hostess.

The servant ushered in a dignified individual wearing gold-rimmed spectacles.

"This is the assistant paying teller of the Boston Sub-Treasury," explained Miss Martin.

He took one of the vacant seats and stared at the prisoner for a few moments.

"Yes," he finally declared, "that is the man who exchanged the money. I can swear to it if necessary."

Beardsley gritted his teeth, but made no audible comment.

"There are two more guests outside," said the lady, addressing the servant. "You may show them both in. They also have stories to tell."

A few minutes elapsed. Beardsley glanced curiously at the door, and then, as it slowly opened, and a stockily built man entered supporting a sickly looking person, the last vestige of color faded from his face, and he averted his eyes.

"Moore!" he groaned, in spite of himself.

The sick man and his companion took the remaining seats, and the latter introduced himself as the United States marshal from Sitka. "We'll now listen to a few words from Mr. Moore," he concluded.

"Jimmie, you're the blackest hearted murderer that God ever made!" declared the ex-cook, speaking slowly and painfully. "Not satisfied with poisonin' all those people and murderin' your pilot, you left me to drown, as you supposed. If you'd asked Ishmak about the depth of the water off the mouths of the Yukon, he'd have told you that there's no spot within five miles of the shore where the water's over five feet deep. It's the mud that comes down the river that makes the water shallow.

"I fell into water about four feet deep, and if you'd looked behind you, you'd have

seen me wade about half-a-mile toward shore and a native meet me with a kaiak. He helped me to Kutlik. I got chilled through, the pneumonia set in and settled on my lungs. The government party took me aboard their boat. I told them the whole story after I got a little better, and—"

A fit of coughing interrupted the story of the sick man. A thread of bloody foam fell from the corner of his mouth. Wiping his face, he continued:

"You once said, Jimmie, that you never had the pleasure of meetin' Fannie MacDonald. You can't say it now, because that's her, sittin' across the table from you. She started across the Pass as soon as she got the news over the telegraph-wire. She got here two months ahead of us, and spent nearly ten thousand with Pinkerton to locate you. She put up at the same hotel with you, and played with you just like a cat does with a mouse—until we should get here. She wanted to make sure of you.

"I'm a hunger. I'll never get any better; but the doctors give me about six months to live. That'll be long enough for me. They've already got my affidavits, but I want to live long enough to tell my story in court. God knows I've been a crook and a thief, but a wilful murderer—never! You're on the way to the chair, Jimmie; and when they tie the electrodes to the base of your skull you can think of the day when you ran away from your pal and left him to drown. I want to—"

Another paroxysm of coughing cut him short. His neighbor then spoke again; this time directly to the prisoner.

"Moore's wrong about the electric chair," he corrected. "We're a little behind the times up in Alaska, and still do things in the old-fashioned way. The State of New York has no jurisdiction over your case, Mr. Classon. Dannie Norton and myself are goin' to take you up to Sitka on a little visit. We'll put you in a place where the squaws won't bother you with any flowers for a spell; and after the judge says the word we're goin' to show you an extra fine gallows that's only been used once or twice. Come on, men, let's get him down-town for the night. It's gettin' late."

The men rose to their feet, two of them half supporting the prisoner between them. Moore kept his seat, as did the young stowaway.

"Just a moment, gentlemen," implored the lady. She patted the youth approvingly upon the back, and addressed the men collectively.

"I want to thank you all for coming here to-night. It might have been arranged differently; but father always said I had a weakness for theatrical effects. I suppose that the course will give me the money in the safe-deposit box in due time. I'm going to take care of Frederic and educate him.

"There is one other thing. Mr. Classon, or Wilson, or whatever his name is, asked me to marry him. I half promised to give him an answer after dinner to-night. I always keep a promise, and my answer to him is 'yes.'"

The men glanced curiously at her.

Beardsley could not believe his ears. "What do you mean?" he managed to gasp.

"It's the woman's privilege to set the wedding date," she continued. "If Mr. Beardsley still desires my hand in marriage, I'll marry him a year from to-day—if—if he is alive!"

The marshal from Sitka chuckled grimly at Fannie MacDonald's little joke; and the last words that came to the ears of the prisoner as he was led from the room were those of Moore.

"In that case there'll be no weddin'," declared the marshal. And there wasn't.

(The end.)

A MYSTERY.

Upon her cheek the blushing rose
Blooms red amid the snow.
It seems to thrive in such a soil;
Then why, I want to know,
Cannot the seed of love be made
In her cold heart to grow?

Margaret Rohe.

An Eye for a Tooth

by

Freeman Putney, Jr.

IN New York her office door bore the gilded legend: "A. Pierce, Detective." Here in the Connecticut hills she was simply Miss Pierce, a summer boarder, who did little but sit in a rocking-chair on the piazza.

"I wonder," she exclaimed, stifling a yawn, "if that specimen is going to stop here."

The "specimen" was a tall, raw-boned man in a rusty, democratic wagon which had halted in front of the farmhouse. The man got out, left his unchecked horse to graze on the roadside grass, and walked directly to the piazza.

"Mornin'," he began, nodding. "Are you Miss Pierce, the detective?"

"That is my name, and I am a detective by profession. Just at present I am taking a vacation."

The man's cold, gray eyes seemed to be taking furtive stock of the slim figure in the rocking-chair before he spoke again.

"New York folks don't generally miss a chance to make a dollar, even in vacation time," he said, pursing his thin, clean-shaven lips. "You ain't so much on size as I expected, but Mr. Reddington said you was all right, and I guess I'll have to take his word for it."

Miss Pierce sat up.

"Mr. Reddington, of Reddington Manor, near Daughton village? You come from there?"

"Yes, marm. I keep a general store there. And o' course everybody knows how you found his uncle's body after the old man disappeared. I cal'late you must have made a handsome thing out of that job, didn't ye? Much as fifty dollars?"

Miss Pierce smiled without replying.

Her fee for her day's work on the Reddington case had been an even thousand dollars.

"Now, this case o' mine ain't so important as that," continued the man, successively rubbing the back of each hand with the palm of the other. "I can't afford no big fees. I—"

"How did you know I was here?" inquired Miss Pierce.

"Mr. Reddington told me the other day, when he was in the store. We just happened to be talkin' o' detectives, and he spoke highly o' you, and I thought then if I ever wanted a detective I'd know where to go. And sure enough, when I unlocked this mornin', and found the place robbed, I just left things as they was and hitched up and come over for you."

He smiled with an emphasis that displayed a wide row of perfect upper teeth whose porcelainlike whiteness betrayed their commercial origin.

Miss Pierce's answering smile was slow.

"You have considerable confidence, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Luke Dalrymple is my name."

"Your store was robbed in the night, I understand, Mr. Dalrymple. What was stolen?"

"Well, the feller must have made himself to home generally. Mussed up the candy a bit, and took some fruit, judgin' by the signs."

"Fruit and candy? Is that all?"

"No! No—marm! He didn't touch none o' the post-office stuff! Scairt of the post-office inspectors, I guess."

"Gracious goodness! What did he take?"

"I'm comin' to it, marm. There was twenty-three dollars o' mine. But what I feel worst about is the eight hundred belongin' to the First Church."

"Eight hundred dollars of church money? Are you the treasurer?"

"No, marm. The church folks been raisin' it for three years to pay off the mortgage. It was banked in old Mrs. Baker's name down to the city, and she went down to draw it out day before yesterday. 'Stead o' gettin' a check, the old idiot, she took it all in bills an' brought it home in her bag. They was goin' to have a jubilee Friday night and pay off the debt and burn the mortgage."

"But how did you happen to have the money?"

"When the other women found she had it in cash they got scairt, and brought it to me to put in my safe until Judge Clough gets back. He holds the mortgage, you see. I took it, but I told 'em I wouldn't be responsible. Told 'em plain before witnesses!" he added.

Miss Pierce stood up.

"I'm on vacation, as I told you, Mr. Dalrymple, but if the church money is at stake I'll help find it."

"Or catch the feller that took it, anyway!" he amended.

"And I feel just like a ride over to Daughton village, so if you'll wait ten minutes I'll go right over with you.

"And now," resumed Miss Pierce when the old horse was headed for Daughton, "whom do you suspect?"

Mr. Dalrymple shook his head virtuously.

"It ain't for me to take away anybody's good name. I won't say I ain't got an idea, but I don't want to say. Leastwise, not now. There's a feller loafs in the store a good deal— But I'll wait and let you see what you make out of it, young woman."

"Oh!" returned Miss Pierce, and she was silent for the remainder of the drive.

The general store at Daughton village was a wooden building, with a covered platform in front. Its windows, into which nobody but strangers ever stopped to look, contained the usual time-stained and fly-specked samples of merchandise, from cotton gloves to canned corn and patent medicines. A woman in a limp print wrapper was standing outside the locked door, and glared indignantly as the democrat wagon drew up.

"Fine doin's!" she snapped. "You go off an' leave your store with nobody to 'tend it, Luke Dalrymple, just at the busy time in the mornin'. No wonder folks say you're losin' your trade!"

Mr. Dalrymple took a large key from his pocket, unlocked the door, and walked into the store, followed by the woman and Miss Pierce.

"What was it you wanted, Mis' Beck?" he inquired from behind the counter.

"A yeast cake," returned Mrs. Beck.

Mr. Dalrymple disappeared toward an ice-box in the rear, and Mrs. Beck relieved her feelings further in Miss Pierce's ear.

"Luke Dalrymple's got me about wore out with his goin's on. Been away at least six days in the last month down to the dentist's in the city, and it seemed as if every time I wanted a little saleratus or somethin' the shop was shet up. And now he goes off again this mornin' just when I was wantin' to mix up a quick sponge for supper! He'd ought not to aggravate cash customers."

"Indeed!" returned Miss Pierce politely.

Mrs. Beck sniffed, took her purchase from the returned Mr. Dalrymple, laid two pennies on the counter, sniffed again, and walked out.

"Her husband is my prize loafer," volunteered the storekeeper. "He's as fat as she is peaked, and Lem don't allow his day has been well spent unless he's put in at least half of it settin' on the platform or on a cracker-box. Looks kind o' suspicious to me that he ain't been around this mornin'."

Miss Pierce was looking at the floor.

"Your burglars seem to have been fond of fruit," she remarked.

"Yes," returned Mr. Dalrymple, "he was."

"Why do you think there was only one?"

"I don't know. Just had a notion."

Miss Pierce stooped and daintily picked up a half-eaten apple. Then, slowly, she placed it on the counter.

"I'll help," volunteered Mr. Dalrymple. "There's more of 'em. I've read about little things bein' clues, so I never touched 'em until you came."

"Six apple-cores," counted Miss Pierce. "And two apples that were barely bitten into and one half eaten. Your burglar was wasteful."

"Some folks are born hogs," agreed Mr. Dalrymple.

"How did he open the safe?" asked Miss Pierce suddenly. Apparently she had accepted the storekeeper's theory of a single burglar.

"It's an old-fashioned key safe," explained the man. "The feller found the key where I keep it hid. Or else he was somebody that knew about it."

"Um-m!" murmured Miss Pierce. "Any loafer in the store might have seen you hide the key when you locked the safe."

"I expect I've been keerless," admitted Mr. Dalrymple.

Miss Pierce was considering the apple-cores, and particularly the apples which had been bitten into.

"Is there a man in the village," she asked slowly, "who has an upper front tooth missing?"

Mr. Dalrymple nodded his head emphatically. Then he shook it.

"Don't ask me to bear no witness against my neighbors, Miss Pierce," he asked. "You see, I'd hate to have a mistake made."

"You're very considerate, I'm sure, Mr. Dalrymple. I admire your high-mindedness. But you should also consider your duty to the public."

"Well, if you put it that way, I s'pose I must. As long's you ask me—well, here comes Lem Beck across the road, and you can see for yourself."

A very red-faced fat man mounted the platform and stuck his head within the front door.

"Mornin', Luke. Has Abby been for some yeast?"

"Yup."

"Then I'll come in. She's been so cantankerous this mornin' that I ain't dast get in her path."

He stepped inside, grinning broadly, and fanning himself with an old hat. One of his upper front teeth was missing.

Miss Pierce had swept the apple fragments beneath an old paper.

"Ask Mr. Beck to have some apples," she whispered.

Mr. Dalrymple hesitated.

"I'll pay for them," offered Miss Pierce.

The storekeeper's hesitation vanished.

"Have some apples, Lem," he invited, waving his hand.

Mr. Beck stared in obvious astonishment.

"Have some apples," repeated the storekeeper, indicating the barrels along the wall. Mr. Beck, convinced that he had heard aright, grinned again.

"Thanks! Don't care if I do, Luke, long's you're treatin'."

He walked to the stock of fruit, looked carefully at each barrel, tested one or two of the fruit with his knuckles, and finally selected four large yellow apples. Then, dropping three of them into his pockets, he cracked the juicy hemisphere in half of the biggest one, and, as he champed it, smiled again through the fragments. Then, suddenly catching Miss Pierce's appreciative gaze, retired in confusion to the outside platform, whence the sound of his steady jaws was plainly audible.

"Well?" Mr. Dalrymple's tone was one of resigned satisfaction. "What d'ye think? If you're lookin' for a feller with an upper tooth gone, I guess it's Lem Beck."

"Is there no one else in the village?"

"No one with just that style o' tooth missin'. O' course, there's some that's been unfortunit and has to wear whole false sets, but no one with jest that one hole."

"Um-m!" said Miss Pierce again. "Have you a telephone?"

"No, but there's one over to the judge's. You ain't goin' to have Lem arrested, are you? Do you think you've got evidence enough?"

"You wait here," directed Miss Pierce, without answering his questions. "I'll be back in a few minutes."

She wrapped the two apples, which had been barely bitten into, in a piece of paper, and carried them with her.

"Evidence!" chuckled Mr. Dalrymple to himself. "I ain't read detective stories for nothin'!" He busied himself over an account-book until the lady returned.

"I've done my telephoning," she an-

nounced, speaking quietly. "Did you tell any one of the robbery, Mr. Dalrymple?"

"Not a soul. I put right for you."

"It's just as well. I have located the thief."

"And it's Lem Beck? Those apples—"

"Those apples were bitten into by a man with an upper front tooth missing. You seem to have quite a fine eye for a tooth, Mr. Dalrymple."

"I? Me? What—"

"I have placed the apples where they will be safe, and will make wax molds of them this afternoon, to preserve the tooth marks."

"Good, Miss Pierce! And you've caught Lem Beck by his tooth-marks on the apples! Now, if that ain't clever! I'd never have thought—"

"Don't lie any more, Mr. Dalrymple! You not only did think, but you laid a very clumsy plot, thinking you could fool me into aiding you in fastening your robbery upon poor Mr. Beck. You great idiot!"

"Idiot! My robbery! Why, you—"

"Don't shout at me, or Mr. Beck will be in here! You laid a plant, as they call it in the city. You ate those apples yourself, and made the tooth marks by knocking out a tooth from your old set of false teeth that you insisted on carrying home from the dentist's last week. You were too mean to throw them away, and they did come in handy, didn't they?"

Mr. Dalrymple's jaw was agape.

"Ye-es," he stammered, "they did."

"The dentist—I got his name from Mrs. Beck—just told me over the phone that he can identify them by the measurements. Furthermore, Lem Beck had neuralgia last night, and not only his poor wife, but his next-door neighbor was well enough aware of the fact to prove a good alibi for him. Shall I call them over, Mr. Dalrymple?"

"No!" he exclaimed hastily. "No—no women folks! It was women folks got me into this. Didn't seem right that all that money should be in the hands of a parcel o' creatures that couldn't take care of it."

"You Adam!" exclaimed Miss Pierce. "Now, does the money go back safely into the hands of the First Church?"

"Yes, marm," returned Mr. Dalrymple.

"Then it's settled, all but my fee, which will be fifty dollars."

"I won't pay it."

"Very well. The people across the street are curious to know why I am here."

"Don't call 'em! I'll pay it! What a numskull I be!"

"You are!" agreed Miss Pierce, grasping the handful of dirty small bills which he counted out to her. "I don't mind telling you that I am going to contribute this to the church treasury. I understand that you have never helped them, and I think it is time. Good morning, Mr. Dalrymple!"

"Hold on!" he exclaimed. "How—how in thunder did you ketch on?"

"I had a feeling in the first place that you did it. Secondly, I have a better eye for a tooth than you have. Thirdly, the apples which were eaten were all red and sour, and those which were barely bitten into were yellow and sweet. A man as thin as you are usually likes sour apples, and a man as fat as Lem Beck wouldn't merely have bitten into the sweet ones. He would have eaten them as greedily as the ones which he selected this forenoon."

"Hold on! You 'greed to pay for them apples!" exclaimed the storekeeper; but Miss Pierce had gone.

EVENING ON THE LAKE.

THE oars float idly on the placid lake,
The drooping shadows deepen one by one,
While towering pine and twisted black-oak take
Their mirrored places, as the setting sun
Transforms the white cloud to a ruddy hue
And tints the waters with a golden glow.
From jutting point where tangled thicket grew
The evening wood-notes of the linnet flow
Full-throated, clear—then die upon the air.
The heavens up-break, and darting through the skies
A long shaft cleaves the lake, revealing there
The water-fairies' gold to wondering eyes.
For Nature swings her doors that all may see,
And gives to those that seek a sesame!

Kenneth Bruce.

Love Among the Lumber-Jacks

By M. J. Phillips

"YOU go to Alpena, Pete Barron, you needn't come back!"

Marie Latour, the settler's daughter, placed her hands on her slender hips, and looked haughtily at the big French Caijan woods boss.

"You no un'erstan', Marie," urged Pete, with more than his usual trace of patois. "By gar, I got to go! These lomber-jack, he must get money. I tell 'em in offees who work longes'. Don' you see?"

"If you go, you needn't come back," repeated Marie, the wilful.

Big Pete, picturesque in his frayed mackinaw, "stag pants," and high boots, shook his head till the tassel on his knitted cap flicked back and forth like the signal of a swinging lantern.

"I got to go, Marie," he pleaded; "by gar, my t'ree hun'erd dollar! I get him."

"I know you, Pete Barron," returned Marie sadly. "For two years now, you tell me how you love me. Last spring, you plan to save your money, so we can be married. What did you do?"

Pete dropped his head like a switched schoolboy under the accusing question. She continued, mercilessly: "You drank and fought and caroused with the rest of the lumber-jacks till every cent was gone. And the land we picked out—Frank Leslie bought it!"

Her tones were cold and level, but the uncomfortable Pete felt that somewhere close behind those brilliant dark eyes were tears. He took a long breath and opened his mouth to speak—to defend himself.

Marie went on, while his jaws gaped apart, like a landed fish: "It will be the same this year—two weeks carousing in Alpena and Bay City. Then your money will be spent. You'll go as a deckhand on some lumber-barge, and then you'll forget all about me!"

"I never forgit you," cried Pete stoutly. "I love you, Marie."

If the words made any impression upon her, the girl did not show it. "What about next winter? Michigan timber is all gone; you and your gang made the last 'big

drive.' Next winter you'll go to Oregon or far Canada; I'll never see you again."

"I swear, Marie," he vowed earnestly; "I git my money at the offees, an' I pay Meester Humphrey, right off queeck, two hun'erd dollar. He sell me two hun'erd acre good lan', behint your papa, by gar.

"We build our little camp, be married, git out the ties and the shingle bolts. Soon we have a nice team, a wagon, some plow!" He spoke with the triumphant pride of one who has already achieved his visions.

He took Marie's tanned little hands in his two great, hairy paws—fists that had battered bullet-heads into submission in many a camp and barroom. And his clasp was soft as velvet.

II.

THE girl suffered her hands to lie a moment in his own; she seemed on the point of believing in him and his dreams. But she steeled herself again and loosened his thick fingers: "No, Pete. I know you better than you do yourself.

"Once get to Alpena with Red MacDonald and Black Jack Murphy, and you'll drink and drink and drink! Stay here till after they go 'way. Frank Leslie will help you get out bolts."

Pete Barron laughed his great, good-natured laugh. "By gar! The Caijans, they no think Pete Barron ever be cedar savage! Lemme wait two, t'ree day 'fore I change from lomber-jack to Sanilacer, Marie."

"If you go, I'm done with you. You needn't come back," repeated the girl firmly, for the third time.

"Kees me once, Marie," wheedled the giant, advancing a step.

"No. You're a lumber-jack. I want a settler for a husband. Good-by." She slipped into the scrub, ere he could prevent, and ran swiftly away to her father's cabin.

Shouldering his "turkey," a well-filled grain-bag, the downcast Pete tramped off toward the Alpena trail. The wilderness was greening under the touch of summer's fingers. The sky was blue, and the air was soft.

The big Caijan sighed. "By gar, dese woman!" he grumbled. "Here I be, in de woods five mont', no fon, no play—just work! An' Marie, she say: 'Go, you Pete, den stay.'

"I show her, mebbe. I no git drunk. I buy de lan'; den eight, fifteen drink, and back to cut bolts lak all de odder cedar savages!"

He grinned at the thought of joining the ranks of the despised Sanilacers—he, Pete Barron, Caijan woods boss!

"Marie, she right," he muttered presently, as he nodded. "'Tis no best be lomber-jack alway. I be settler, too—Marie an' me, on dat two hun'erd acre."

With an ineradicable grace inherited from his forefathers, he threw a kiss backward over his shoulder, in the direction of Gaston Letour's cabin.

As he stepped into the main trail, which would in time achieve the dignity of a wagon-road, a deep-pitched howl of welcome greeted him. The forty hairy giants of his gang had been waiting impatiently while he made his by-excursion to the Letour home.

Now, with dull eyes sparkling in anticipation of the pleasures of Alpena, they hoisted their "turkeys," and set off cityward. At their head, by might of right, tramped the brawniest of them all—Pete Barron and Red MacDonald and Black Jack Murphy.

III.

IT was sundown when a roar like unto the siren of a passenger steamer brought the people of Alpena flocking to their front doors. They came, a sense of the dramatic tingling in their brains, to look their last upon a vanishing army.

For, as Marie had said, lumbering in Michigan was over. Pete Barron and his gang were the sackers of the drive. The last of the big timber had fallen before their axes. The book of lumber-jack achievements was about to be closed—forever.

This rearguard of a departing host bore themselves as heroes should. Hobnailed boots clashed bravely on cement walks. Heavy caps, peaked or tasseled, perched at daredevil angles on unshorn heads. The heavy shoulders, padded and knotted with sheer strength, swayed provocatively. Hoarse voices bellowed a favorite woods song.

White-aproned bartenders smirked invitingly in the entrance of their "places"; excited dogs gamboled and barked about the advancing battalion. A policeman, three blocks away, gazed thoughtfully up the street, then sauntered into an alley.

Right across the city they marched, to the lumber company's office on the shore of Thunder bay. There, entrenched behind stacks of currency, a half-dozen clerks awaited them.

By virtue of his position as boss, Pete Barron was invited behind the railing with his thumbed and dog-eared account book, to assist in the joyful ceremony of paying off.

It was nine o'clock when the last dispute had been settled; when the last "rollway man" and "swamper" had received his wad of greenbacks, and was off at a gallop to spend it.

His two lieutenants, Murphy and MacDonald, waited for Pete Barron. They were the last whose names were checked off the list marked "Paid."

Besides his three hundred dollars, the Caijan received a bonus of fifty dollars from the company for faithful service. He had been with them for a dozen seasons, leaving his Canadian home when a stripling of eighteen to plunge into the Michigan wilderness.

Pete looked about for Mr. Humphrey, the company's land agent; but that official was away, he was told. With a sigh, half of regret and half of relief, the woods boss thrust his fistful of fives and tens loose into a convenient pocket.

Their "turkeys" were disposed of for the time in a back room of the company's office. They were free, after nearly half a year of hard work and abstinence—free to seek crude, elemental pleasure in their own primitive way.

They paused a moment on the threshold of the office building to get their bearings. It was pitch dark, and the rain was falling in torrents.

Off to the south, in Lower town, the gang was loose. Snatches of song, whoops and yells floated up to them. Came a pistol-shot, and the rattle of a policeman's whistle.

Pete Barron gave his Jovelike laugh. He thrust one hand through the arm of Black Jack, and the other through the arm of Red MacDonald; with one accord they turned toward Lower town.

They yielded not a whit to anything. The rain pelted them briskly; they swaggered on, unheeding. People who passed did so by way of the gutter; the three musketeers of the forest held the right of way.

At the first saloon they paused, wheeled in unison, and faced the door. They disdained to put hand to it; Pete Barron smashed the latch with one sweep of a hobnailed river boot.

The door shot open and they marched to the bar, arm in arm still. A dozen of the gang were there, and they were greeted with noisy delight. A place was made for them in the center.

"Whurroo, me hearties!" roared Black Jack. "All up, all up! This wan's on Black Jack. Licker!"

Three bartenders hurried back and forth, setting out bottles. Black Jack, as master of ceremonies, seized the nearest and filled the glasses of himself and his companions to the brim. Then he rapped on the bar with iron knuckles.

"Whisht, ye tarriers!" he shouted.

Comparative silence ensued. He raised his glass. "To Pete Barron, the best woods boss in th' wurrld!"

The flattered Caijan raised his glass with the rest. The lumber-jacks swore at him affectionately.

The fat proprietor of the saloon grinned complacently as he estimated his profits. The three newcomers should be good for fifty dollars apiece.

His drink was within an inch of Pete Barron's lips when he paused, and set it down untasted. Directly facing him, on the dingy, cracked bar-mirror, hung a calendar.

It was too sweet and decent for the place. It showed, simply, the pictured head of a young girl—a girl with dark eyes that seemed to gaze straight back at him.

The Caijan stared at the calendar almost with awe. The eyes, by gar, looked just as Marie's did when she talked to him this afternoon—cold, but with tears very near them.

Marie, she liked him, but she knew what he would do—get drunk and spend all his money. Then, away across the continent to the last big woods.

No wife, no two hundred acres, no team, nor wagon, nor plow. He wasn't a settler or a Sanilacer; he was only a lumber-jack.

He raised the glass again, but the sorrowful eyes of the calendar held him. Again he set it down.

He rasped the floor impatiently with his hobnails. His great fingers clinched on the edge of the bar. He caught his under-lip a moment with his white teeth.

But the woods breed quick decisions. Of a sudden he threw back his head and

laughed his great laugh. Then he slapped a ten-dollar bill down on the bar. "Drink up, you mushers!" he cried. "Drink on Pete Barron—the las'!"

"You're no dr-rinkin' yerself, mon," said Red MacDonald chidingly.

"No, by gar!" shouted the Caijan in a voice that carried above the uproar. "Only a lomber-jack can drink. For me, I can't. I'm a cedar savage!"

This rich joke brought first its moment of astonished silence, and then a gust of merriment that tattered the low-hanging clouds of tobacco-smoke to rags. Those nearest Pete Barron clapped him on the back appreciatively, with hands as heavy as trip-hammers.

Only the saloonkeeper saw that the woods boss meant what he said. He feared the effect on his trade if Barron entered into explanations. The thing to do was to get rid of the boss at once. He leaned across the bar and sneered: "What's wrong, Frenchy? Gittin' stingy?"

The Caijan caught the intended insult in the other's words and manner. With his great laugh he swept his glass from the bar and dashed the whisky squarely in the saloonkeeper's face. The glass followed, shivering into bits on the man's low forehead.

Still laughing, he seized Red MacDonald and Black Jack by the nearest shoulder and shook them with rough affection, as a grizzly would caress her cubs. As the raw odor of the spilled liquor mounted to his nostrils, he released the wondering pair, and shuddered with desire.

But his aroused will drove lagging limbs away from the bar. He pulled open the splintered door, looked smilingly at the men of his gang, suddenly hushed by his queer action, and said: "Good-by, lomber-jack! Good-by—for alway!"

The door slammed behind him.

Gaston Latour was awakened from sleep at midnight by a hammering and by the roaring of a great voice, which boomed above the noise of the rain: "Open, Gaston, open! By gar, you slip soun'! Who 'tis? Why, me—Pete Barron! Who you expec'? Lemme spik with Marie a little while."

Marie came running from her little room, barefooted, a quilt caught around her. The dark eyes were clear and bright; she had not slept.

"Pete!" she cried.

"Sure," replied the Caijan airily. "Marie, here t'ree hun'erd forty dollar. To-morrow we get married, buy de lan' behint your papa, an' build a little camp. Mebbe Caijan laugh; but Pete Barron, he cedar savage now!"

"Pete!" cried the girl again, joy in her voice and her luminous eyes. "But where you going?"

"I slip in de barn," he chuckled, "with the horse—by gar!"

The exclamation was wrung from him by sheer astonishment. For the girl, her hands full of money, which at that moment she had not in the least expected, and trying to keep the quilt about her, had stood on tiptoe and kissed him.

THE PATRIOT.

Not he who hears the culverin,
  And follows with the dream of fame,
In the embattled lists shall win
  The patriot's name.

Not he whose gifts, though high they are—
  The statesman's power, the courtier's grace—
If mere ambition be his star,
  Shall touch that place;

But rather he whose modest mien
  Conceals a heart of sacrifice,
Who walks with duty's light serene
  In his clear eyes!

Clinton Scollard.

"The Good Thing"

By Nalbro Bartley

WHEN the Huxton jewelry-shop was robbed, the entire city sat up and took notice. It denounced with scorn the skill of police-headquarters and patronized the locksmith's with amusing frequency.

Mrs. Thomas Berry read all accounts of the thrilling crime with that pleasurable sensation of horror and personal security possessed by all brides whose husbands are six feet tall, and who live on the eighth floor of a fire-proof, burglar-proof, agent-proof apartment-house.

Mrs. Berry amused herself by reading and shivering over each sensational detail in the affair, imagining by turn that she was the wounded watchman, the surprised night police, the agonized owners of the shop, and even the daring, brutal, crafty cracksmen, who "pulled" the deal.

Then she would fold up the paper tenderly, ready for future use on the pantry shelves, and say: "It is so hard to realize that there are such people in the world."

Shortly after the police had abandoned finding the criminals and the wounded watchman's family had ceased preying on public sympathy, Tom Berry made his wife a handsome present of a sapphire ring.

Nan had wanted a sapphire ring for a long time; but she told her husband, with the fortitude and self-sacrifice, also peculiar to brides, that he must not be extravagant; she would rather have him double-up on the life insurance question.

"What is the occasion for this?" she asked, watching it flash on her finger.

Her husband now shifted uneasily in his chair.

"Um—made a good thing the other day, thought it wouldn't be square to let all the gain go up in fifteen-cent smokes; knew you wanted it—" Then he trailed off into asking if the windows needed weather strips or not.

His wife put her hand, ring and all, on his shoulder, and viewed the effect approvingly.

"It looks like one they had in Huxton's just before Christmas," she purred.

Tom gave an abrupt turn in his chair and rattled his paper.

"Well, it came from the Decker shop, not from any auction sale of burglars' débris," he told her.

"Why, I didn't say it did," she retorted. "I just said it looked like one that had been in the Huxton window. Of course, those burglars took anything as good looking as this ring."

Her husband read on in silence. Presently she added: "I wonder if they will ever catch those men. Do you think so, Tom?"

Tom didn't. He said he wasn't interested in reading a lot of trash about burglars. And Nan, who took Tom's views of all public affairs as final, believed that the burglars would be permitted to lead a carefree life.

"What sort of a 'good thing' was it that you found?" she persisted later on.

"Now, Nan, you wouldn't understand anything about it," she was told with painful patience. "You would only have a headache after I got through explaining it. It was a deal—in stocks."

"Not gambling—or any of those bucket-shop things?"

"Oh, no; just a good thing — perfectly

legitimate." And her husband smiled, as she bent over to watch the ring sparkle under the light.

A month later, the safe at the Daltam Savings Bank was dynamited, thousands of dollars stolen and the watchman murdered. Again the authorities polished up their badges and the newspapers gleefully devoted the front pages to the affair.

Nan forgot to embroider her Easter lingerie waist, as she became absorbed in the crime. The fact that the watchman had been killed gave her a keener sense of horror. And she mentioned that fact to her husband.

"If you'd cut out reading this truck," he told her, "you'd be a great deal better off. What good does it do? I'd rather see you subscribing to the *Inglenook Companion,* or the *Ladies' Boudoir Secrets.*"

"I take an interest in the public welfare," she replied icily. "There is no reason why a woman shouldn't have ideas about crime as well as a man—"

She paused, noting the peculiar expression on his face.

"Ideas?" he asked quickly. "Why—what ideas have you about it?"

"I didn't say I had any, but I might have some. And if I did, I certainly wouldn't tell them to you, to be ridiculed and laughed at. That reminds me, I must get the broth ready for Dan McCarthy—"

Her husband caught her arm.

"Dan who?"

"McCarthy — the watchman that was hurt at the Huxton robbery. There are half a dozen of us that take him things to eat. His wife is ill herself, and there are four children—"

"See here, Nan, shove that. McCarthy is well taken care of. You needn't bother going again."

"How do you know he is?"

"I see to it myself."

"So. That is why he always smiles at me, and seems to be wanting to share a good joke and can't."

They faced each other angrily.

"Nan, I forbid your going down to see that family again."

"I shall certainly pay no attention to your absurd wishes. I am going—"

"You sha'n't."

"Why?"

And Berry hastily took refuge under the best feminine reason in the world—"because."

"Well, I am going," Nan told him emphatically, as she started to put on her things.

"It's bad for your nerves," Berry persisted, "to go chasing round with a bunch of sloppy grub like that. The next thing you'll be doing is to buy a wreath of everlasting stuff for the Daltam watchman's grave."

"Thanks for the suggestion. I hadn't thought of it."

The matter ended there, and Nan went on her way. When she saw her husband at luncheon, she refused to give an account of the visit. Instead, she discussed the recent burglary.

"Do you think there is any possibility of getting these men?" she asked. "McCarthy said he thought it was the same gang."

"I'm going down to see McCarthy myself and tell him to stop talking to you about such things," Tom answered testily, "and please telephone headquarters when you want more information about criminal events. I am not a Bertillon thumb expert or master of ceremonies in the rogues' gallery."

"Yes, but you read every line of the case so eagerly. It is the first thing you do read—"

"It's the first thing on the first page."

Rebuffed, Nan changed the subject. That afternoon Tom changed his coat. The old one had a rip in the sleeve, and he wanted it mended. After he left, Nan picked up the old coat tenderly. How foolish to quarrel merely because she had taken broth to a hurt watchman!

She let her hand slip down into the inside pocket—the one on the left. A small booklet lay within. She drew it out carelessly and laid it down without glancing at the title.

She started sewing. When she finished, she picked up the pamphlet to replace it and the title caught her eye:

THIEF TOOLS AND HOW TO USE THEM.

She opened it and began reading. Several passages were marked with pencil, others underscored and comments written in her husband's hand were in the margin. It was an unauthorized pamphlet, secretly

published and distributed among criminals. There had been a name of a previous owner on the cover, partially rubbed off.

As she closed the book, the brilliant sparkle of the sapphire ring gave her an unpleasant sensation. Of course it was absurd and foolish to—

Nan stuffed the book back into the pocket and laid her cheek against the shiny coat sleeve. Just as if Tom Berry could. It was high treason to even think such a thing to herself.

She wandered into his room to hang up the coat. A button was loose on his storm overcoat. Somehow her hand slipped into the inside pocket.

Another booklet!

This was a crime vocabulary, police methods of capturing criminals, the story of six thrilling escapes from prison, written by ex-jailbirds. Another secretly published bit of inside information.

Nan turned the sapphire ring on her finger thoughtfully. Tom had never explained the "good thing" he had stumbled across. Sapphire rings are expensive. Of course it was foolish—yet the books—

Callers came and she banished the subject from her mind. That evening they were going to the theater. Tom's silk muffler was missing, and Nan obediently rummaged through the dresser-drawers.

She opened the last one—Tom's special lost and found counter—and felt among the pile of shirts. A long, slender steel bar came to view. From reading the pamphlets, she knew that it was a burglar's jimmy.

"Can't you find it, Nan?" asked her husband.

"No," she said faintly. "You better wear the old one."

As they went down in the elevator, Tom noticed that she looked white. But she told him that it was the cold. At that same moment, she remembered that on the evening of the Huxton burglary and the Daltam Bank dynamiting, he had been out of town. Special business she had been told.

The next morning Nan began on the subject of burglars.

"I think it must be the most terrible thing in the world," she said, "to be a criminal and have to live day in day out in terror of every policeman you see, of every stranger that passes you by, of every—"

"Nan, have you gone plumb loco over the thing?" asked Berry. "You talk of nothing else. In the maddest moments of mirth last night, your eyes were shut tight. What were you thinking about?"

"I was wondering about catching the—men."

"This has gone far enough," he continued. "I was going to suggest to you today that you take a trip somewhere. What do you say to the Bermudas? Two months down there would bring you back into the ring without knowing it."

"Alone?"

"No; take Harriet or your cousin or anyone else you fancy. I'd come if I possibly could—but I've got a lot of good things started and I can't get away."

"What good things?" Nan rumpled the table-cloth in her fingers.

"Oh—deals. You wouldn't understand."

"No; I suppose not. But where is the money for the trip coming from?" Nan prided herself on not overstepping her husband's income.

"Well, I made a good thing the other day. Chilson tipped me off to it. He's in on it, too, only on a bigger scale. Nothing very big for me, you know—but nice pin money."

"You seem to be making several good things—on the market. I should think being a private secretary would keep you busy."

"A chap bumps into a lot of extra tricks now and then. I'm glad for your sake that I landed this last one. You're run down, Nan. I don't like all this morbid talk about criminals. Any one would think you were in training for a probation officer."

"Was this last 'good thing' better—than the first?"

"Yes, came easier, too. Where's your ring, dear—don't you wear it?"

"It's too big," and Nan put her head on the table and sobbed.

Berry lifted her in his arms.

"It's time you had your steamer-trunk packed, and were counting the number of *bon voyage* boxes coming your way. Nan, what's bothering you? Tell me."

"Nothing; only I don't like these 'good things.'"

"Why pal, you don't mind because I'm not letting you in on every side-play, do you? Really, those account-books you lassoed me into keeping the first two months were lots of fun and all that—but they weren't exactly practical. You know, even then, I didn't register everything I should have on my side of the ledger."

"No, I suppose you didn't," his wife said slowly, looking out the window.

"Well, a fellow has to— See here," his tone changed. "You'll be your old self again when you romp back from Bermuda. Where's your enthusiasm gone to anyway? You used to be wild to go. Remember how you planned it for our—"

"Tell me," she interrupted, "do you really want me to go?"

"Much as I shall miss you, old chap," he answered tenderly, I really want you to go."

"Very well," she said passively, moving away from his embrace, "I'll wire Harriet in the afternoon."

"You won't be lonesome—seeing everything. The time will fly before you come back. Then it'll be a second honeymoon."

"I'll sail the end of the week, if you can engage passage," she continued.

"Better rest to-day. I'll bring home a bunch of guide-books for us to look over to-night," he promised, putting on his storm-coat. "You'll be thanking me that I did turn a good thing when you get my dismal letters about blizzards and being snowed up and other polar extras. If Harriet can't go, ask Fanny Mack. She's a jolly sort and ought to chase the blue butterflies—"

His hand felt the inside pocket and a frown came across his face.

"Did you lose something?" asked Nan quietly.

"Yes—important, too. I—er—yes, here it is on the other side. That's odd. I was sure I always put it in the right-hand pocket—"

"What was it?"

Nan's voice sounded far away.

"A memorandum. It's all right."

With a hasty kiss he left her.

Alone, Nan seized the morning paper to read the half-column account of the bank case developments. The police had traced a clue to a certain tenement building in the lower part of the city. It was believed that some accomplice or member of the gang was in hiding there.

Impulsively, she put on her hat and coat. Then she paused. After all, what proof had she? Two bits of printed matter, a jimmy, a sapphire ring, the offered Bermuda trip. That on one side, and on the other the four years that she had known and loved Tom Berry before she married him and one year of happily married life.

She glanced at the paper again. Just below the crime story was a small item to the effect that Ronald L. Chilson, broker, had failed. Then how had he given Tom a tip on one of his own deals—when he had failed? How could Tom make money, an unexperienced man in the commercial market, when the man engineering the deal had become bankrupt?

"A thief!" She repeated the words slowly. "A thief!"

Nan went out of the apartment house hurriedly. She took a car in the direction of the tenement house. It was an unwise, hasty action. She did not know herself where she was going. As she left the car, she caught sight of one of the McCarthy children playing on the corner.

"Your husband just went down the street," she was told.

"Which street?"

"That one—he went round the corner by the tenement block."

"Thank you," Nan found herself saying politely.

Womanlike, she fled in the direction of the car and went home. To her mind, there was no further doubt.

"Did you wire Harriet?" was the first question she was asked that evening.

"No, I decided to wait another week before going."

"But I engaged passage for Saturday. There's no reason why you shouldn't go."

"Then cancel it," said Nan coldly. "I can't be ready."

"Why?"

"Because I can't. What's the hurry? Do you want me away from you as badly as all that?"

Her lower lip trembled, and she bent her head so he would not see it.

"Don't be foolish."

"You want to be rid of me," she burst out suddenly. "I know, I know."

"Know what?" demanded Berry, starting to his feet.

Nan turned her head away.

"That you want me to go away."

"Well, it will be a sanitorium *per annum* for both of us, if you don't go pretty soon. How much of this high tragedy, me-child business do you think is needed for two ordinary people, both of years of discretion?"

"Very well, then," said Nan suddenly, "I will go."

"Now you're sensible again. I'll tell you a secret. I want to do some work—

and it would be better for you to go away. When you come back—"

The last bit of evidence had linked itself into place — his going to the tenement. Then, too, he was afraid of being caught. He wanted her to go away for fear she would be there when the denouncement came. He wanted to spare her the suffering of seeing him taken to prison—

Berry followed her into her own room awkwardly.

"Are you ill?"

"No; I wish you would wire Harriet Stanton," she answered clearly. "I'm going to pack."

The following afternoon papers came out with a bold promise of the capture of the thieves. There would be no doubt, according to the police, that the leader of the gang would be taken before very many editions had gone to press.

Nan read the prophecy with stoic calmness. She knew now why he insisted that she go at once.

The bell rang. Nan dared not answer it. It pealed on insistently. Presently, she nerved herself to open the door. A telegram was thrust in. It was from Harriet, saying:

Delighted—letter to follow—will come Friday.

Nan crumpled it in her hands and threw it in the fire. A new impulse came to her. She would save Tom. Even though he were a thief—she would save him.

For the first time since her marriage Nan became conscious that she, too, was an active partner in the yoke—that her time for responsibility had come. "For better or for worse," she said, as she moved mechanically about, picking dried leaves off her fern.

The Juanita sailed Friday at half past four. Friday morning Nan told her husband that Harriet would come on the noon train. So he promised to be home as soon as he could.

Nan had tried to plan out every detail. Tom must take a Western express, and she would sail for Bermuda. They would leave the flat just as it was—there was no help for that. She would give him all the money that he had managed to realize, and then trust to luck. Perhaps some time they might be able to start again, and then—

The bell was ringing. A man stood outside asking for her husband. Nan tried to smile as she told him Mr. Berry had gone South unexpectedly.

"That's strange," said the man. "I thought I'd surely catch him."

"It was urgent business," faltered Nan.

"When will he be back?" urged the stranger.

"I don't know," said Nan, shutting the door.

Then began a new anxiety. Who was the man? Crook or detective? What did he want? Should she have said South? Suppose he met Tom coming home and took him? Suppose they never had a chance to see each other alone again, and she could never tell him that she understood and loved him just the same? That she didn't—

Nan buried her head in her hands and tried to stop the rush of questions. The chirp of the canary bird roused her. Even in the turmoil she wondered who would care for him. It was Tom's bird—he had always fancied having one. Nan took the cage down, preparatory to asking the janitor if he would take it.

Tom opened the outer door briskly.

"What in the world are you doing with Chip?" he asked.

"I'm going to give him to Duncan," she faltered. "He will look after him—"

"Duncan! I'll do the cuttlefish-bone menu act. He's company for me. Where's Harriet? Are you all packed?"

"She—didn't come."

"Didn't come? Great Scott! Isn't she going?"

Nan shook her head. She set the bird-cage down gently.

"I wired her not to," she confessed.

"Wired her not to go? Then, who is coming?"

"I'll go alone," she whispered. "It would be better."

Berry stood looking at her perplexedly.

"I think I'll call up the nurses' directory and find a white cap that wants salt air," he murmured, starting for the telephone.

Nan clutched him by the arm.

"Tom—don't, don't, don't keep it from me any longer. I know. It doesn't make any difference to me, but you must save yourself. Don't you see there's a chance—I told the man you were South—"

"Save who—what chance—"

"From being arrested. I know you wanted to spare me, dear, but I knew all along. I knew. I found the books in your pocket and the jimmy, and I knew that the money for the ring didn't come—"

Berry looked as though a shower-bath

had been informally and unceremoniously introduced to him.

"Will you please try to tell me in good old New York State language just what you want me to save myself from? Cold feet, too much delicatessen diet, oversleeping—what?"

"The robbery! Don't try to keep up the illusion any longer. I found it out. There is time if you go West; you can take the chance—"

"Robbery? What robbery?"

"The Huxton and the Daltam deals. I guessed about it. Everything led up to it. You wanted me to go away because they might take you at any minute, and you wanted me to remember you—"

"Nan, you're a regular Denver Doll of the Mounted Police. Let me break it to you gently. I am no red-handed, wily, elusive but interesting cracksman. I am not wanted by the police, neither am I a secret-service man put on the trail. I am the humble, shamed author of a series of dime novels for the Acton people, based on all recent crimes which occur. I made a hit with the story of the Huxton affair. I spent two-thirds of the pay-check on your ring.

"The Daltam case promises to be a regular thriller, with a few extra rolling R's. The publishers have it all doped out—and I'm under contract.

"I thought I could work faster if you were basking on some of the advance proceeds in sunny Bermuda. So I tried to steer you right."

"Then, you—the books—the thieves' tools—"

"Just another disadvantage of finding oneself a genius. I never tried a dime-novel game before, and was as helpless as a two-year-old regarding thief technicalities. Really, they are very particular. So I had to get busy and study.

"I've haunted headquarters and tenements, and your broth friend, Dan McCarthy, was a good help. He was in on my game. I just met a man on the corner that said you told him I was South. That was the day-watchman at the Daltam bank. He was going to give me an exact plan of the place."

"Why—why didn't you tell me—dime novels—"

"Well, it wasn't truly Bostonese, and I knew you were keen on the uplift. You had so many highbrow magazine subscriptions I didn't dare own up. I thought I could shove it in as an extra good thing. I write under the name of Tatters."

Nan was laughing, crying, all in one.

"And the firm—do they know?"

"Not a word; but you see genius will be misjudged—"

Nan lay submissively in his arms. The last few days seemed like a dream.

"And so," continued her husband, "you were trying to save me, whom you believed guilty of burglary?"

She nodded. Berry kissed her tenderly.

"I suppose you even pawned the blue ring to help along?"

Another assent. Nan looked up shyly.

"You'll never forgive me, will you," she whispered, "for the accusation?"

"Well, they've hung men on circumstantial evidence," he laughed back, "and anyhow my hands are tied, after your appeal for my hieing to police proof quarters."

Nan dimpled.

"What are you going to do now?" she asked.

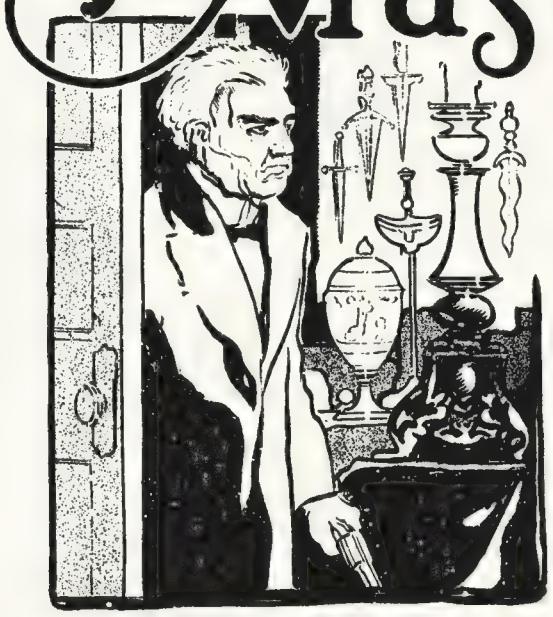
"Nothing, except wire Harriet, restore the blue ring, and use you as the heroine for the next novel!"

CAUGHT.

"DAME FORTUNE smiles! Most kindly fate!"
I cried on meeting pretty Kate
Unfastening her garden gate;
"How luckily we meet!"
But Kate replied, "If I were you,
I'd only give the dame her due;
I've seen you for an hour or two
Awaiting down the street!"

Doris Webb.

Master of Them All



By

Stephen Chalmers

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

FIVE master crooks live together in an apartment. Their butler is David Lamar. Fennell, who has long been their leader, wishes to retire, but cannot find a fitting successor. Suddenly Lamar proves his fitness, and that he is the greatest crook of them all. Though the other four crooks resent his ascendancy, he compels them to obey him, and, aiming his machinations against the richest man in the world, Lorenzo Vandewater, he bids Gough bring in immediately ten thousand dollars; Miles kidnap Lorenzo Vandewater's little son, an only child; St. Cloud steal the famous Sheba necklace from Mrs. Vandewater; and Cobb procure the Babylonian deluge tablet, which, a gift from Vandewater, is now in the Natural History Museum.

CHAPTER V.

MUTINY!

"WHAT do you think of it all, Ezra?" asked Fennell.

They were seated in the syndicate's apartments just about the time that Cobb and St. Cloud were having their troubles.

"Don't have to think," said Ezra, drawing the black clay pipe from his mouth and studying it affectionately. "Things are. He is."

"Tell me some more," said Fennell.

Ezra smoked a while and seemed to be gathering some stray fragments of connected language necessary to the narration of a tale. After grunting "Sultan of Salivat" as a prefatory and explanatory label, he jerked out the story of that adventure, in which he himself had been with David Lamar in action.

"Sultan in summer kiosk," said Ezra. "Relampago—Lamar—stepped out. 'How-d'y' do!' How'd he get there? Relampago's way—got there. Sultan suspicious man. Always armed. Covered Lamar—Relampago then.

"Lamar never winks. Can't. Notice his eyes? Didn't then. Just waited. Told Sultan of Salivat plot to kill him. Revolt among soldiers. Come to warn him. Get away for few hours. All blow over. But—get away!

"Sultan of Salivat believe anything about somebody plotting to kill him. Swallowed it all. Any way to get aboard warship without being seen? Warship loyal—

This story began in The Cavalier for June.

so Lamar said. Sultan relieved. Went through tunnel—old tunnel used for the sack after the bowstring. Comes out on sea. I was there—in a boat. Took him off to war-ship, locked him up, and Lamar gave orders to sail.

"How'd get war-ship? Lamar's way—got it. Brought Sultan aboard. Everybody recognized. Said nothing. Rumor of plot to kill—from Lamar. S-s-s-s-h! Not a word. Obey Sultan's orders."

Ezra blew a blast of vile tobacco-smoke from the dirty clay and chuckled in a ponderous way.

"Obeyed Lamar. Thought orders from Sultan. Sultan locked in the cabin. Didn't wish to be seen. Lamar was Sultan *pro tem.*

"War-ship steamed outside three days. Sultan locked in cabin. Put wise. Begged for life. Lamar said all right. Crown jewels. Written order. Sultan refused. Tried door. Nothing doing. Steward brought meals. Lamar said first word to slave—shoot. Sultan of Salivat loves life. Why? Don't know. Can't sleep. Can't eat. All plots. Poison. Knife. Bowstring. Sack.

"First day, cut toe off—little toe left foot. Wouldn't write order. Second day little toe—right foot. Third day—signed order. Crown jewels to be delivered in meal-sack aboard war-ship. Got 'em!"

"How did he—you—Lamar and you—get away with it?" asked Fennell, his brow clouding uneasily.

"Lamar's way," grunted Ezra. "Dropped anchor. Lowered boat. Helped Sultan in. Officers all lined up, bowing. Sultan said nothing. Lamar ready to kill—one shot—told him so. I rowed. Lamar and Sultan went up the tunnel. Lamar left him in summer kiosk where he picked him up. People of Salivat said, after, Sultan was magic. Fell asleep in kiosk. Woke up in kiosk. Three days vanished. Where? Magic!"

"Sounds like the 'Arabian Nights' to me," said Fennell gloomily. He was beginning to fear that he had relinquished his power to a man who was really greater than himself—a man who would hold the relinquished leadership just as long as it suited him to hold it.

It was apparent to Fennell, from the reminiscent satisfaction that glowed in Ezra Miles's face, that Lamar had, at least, one worshiper of absolute, immovable loyalty.

Maurice St. Cloud made his entrance shortly after midnight. He nodded ungraciously to the two smokers. Then he laid his silk hat on the center of the table and pitched his gloves into it, one by one, his gestures full of disgust.

"Has Lamar returned?" he inquired carefully, but with an air of the casual.

"Haven't seen our worthy friend since he issued his dictation at noon," said Fennell. "Anything troubling you, Maurice?"

"Oh, nothing at all—nothing at all!" said the elegant, with sarcasm. "Why should anything trouble me, or any of us? We are irresponsible. We haven't brains enough to have the capacity for trouble. Lamar shoulders all that."

"Well, out with it," said Fennell, with a short laugh. "You needn't be afraid. He isn't here."

"I wouldn't be afraid if he were!" snapped St. Cloud, his face flushing crimson. "In fact, I have just left him. And I said to him what I would say to you."

"Say it."

"I got the necklace," said St. Cloud, posing indifference as he kicked off his shoes and put on a pair of slippers. "It was no easy task. Got into the box—by mistake, you understand, during the singing of a beautiful aria. One is apt to make mistakes when under the thrall of music. The wrong box is very simple and excusable.

"I was within two feet of the necklace, and its catch was very simple. But it would have been utterly impossible—there, in a box, upon which a dozen lorgnettes were constantly trained — if something hadn't happened to divert the entire audience's attention.

"A man fell in a fit down near the orchestra. I got the necklace and forgot my hat and gloves. Went back for them. That was ticklish, but I got away with it. As I left the opera-house, I saw them putting *David Lamar* in a cab!

"It was he who had fallen in the fit. I met him around the corner. I resented his interference in my game. It was like stealing another man's honors. Anyhow, *I* had procured the necklace.

"Then—what do you suppose he 'ordered' me to do?"

"Give up guessing at Lamar," said Fennell.

"Told me to put the necklace back where I got it—*on the lady's neck!*"

"Whew!" whistled Fennell, while Ezra blinked. "Of course—you didn't."

St. Cloud flushed again and evinced extraordinary embarrassment.

"I—I—" he stammered. "Yes, I did put it back," he added triumphantly. "Just to show him he couldn't bluff me."

"How on earth did you do it?" asked Fennell, his eyes wide with astonishment.

"How? Simplest thing in the world to a man who has the entry. Went back to the box, apologized for the intrusion, and asked Mrs. Vandewater if this was not her necklace. She nearly fainted when she put her hands to her throat. Where did I get it? How did I know it was hers?

"Who, of course, finding the Sheba necklace in the aisle near the Vandewater box, would not know to whom it belonged? It was a pleasure to serve Mrs. Vandewater. The catch must be loose. She really ought not to wear such a priceless heirloom. And the finder—your humble servant—was rewarded with an invitation to call!"

St. Cloud's version of the story was not quite accurate. His vanity was greater than his truthfulness. He failed to mention that he had not had the honor of Mrs. Vandewater's acquaintance until that night. He failed to mention that it was Lamar who had suggested the simple way in which the necklace might be returned. He failed to mention that Lamar's whole object was to seal an acquaintanceship which would give the social Maurice the entry to the house of Vandewater—an entry from which David Lamar proposed to profit.

"Seems to me like tickling providence with a hot needle," said Fennell, "although, of course, there may be method—"

"Method—bah! Melodrama!" sneered St. Cloud.

Calvin Cobb came in while they were talking. Cobb seemed to be hurrying whence and about to hurry whither. That was Cobb.

"Hallo, Maurice!" he hailed. "Get the necklace?"

When Cobb heard the details of the opera-house adventure he burst out in a profuse perspiration. Mr. Cobb had not yet procured the tablet, but his plan was formed. The unpleasant thought came to him that once he get the tablet, Lamar might ask *him* to put *it* back!

"Of course," said Cobb, "I could always say I just borrowed it to show my little sister, who's in bed with the measles and can't get out to the museum."

Then Mr. Cobb lost his temper. Sweating like a fat bull on a hot day, he told them how this same stone was the one he had stolen from Professor Schimmel, and which had later been stolen from him at Port Saïd.

"And I'm to perform the fool stunt of stealing it again. And after I get it out of a guarded museum he'll tell me to put *that* back?

"No, sir!" raved Cobb. "I'll get it—you bet I'll get it!—to make him crawl, if nothing else. Oh, yes. I'll put it back, smashed into a million pieces not big enough to hold a cent!"

"Why get it out at all?" inquired St. Cloud languidly. "Why not tell this imposing criminal genius to get it himself?"

Cobb stared. Here was a question he somehow could not answer. He was relieved of the necessity by the entrance of Dudley Gough, who seemed in good humor—the good humor that is immensely pleased with its proprietor. When he heard that a sort of mutiny was in the air, he smiled.

"That's all very well," he said. "I'm with you about making Mr. Lamar stop playing charades. But the plot is premature. I, for one, will have nothing to say until the little mine I have laid produces $10,000 to-morrow. Then I can talk.

"If anybody has a real grudge against Lamar—and we none of us love David as David loved Jonathan—give him a long rope and watch him hang himself."

Fennell said nothing. Apparently he was not ill-pleased at this mutinous talk against the man he himself had defended twelve hours before. Ezra gave a grunt that might have meant anything. Calvin Cobb took it to mean approval of Gough's ideas.

"That's the talk," said he, rapping his fist on the table. "Let things run. I'll get that tablet to-morrow. Ezra'll get the kid. We'll all make good. Then—"

Then David Lamar came through the door like a stalking tiger. He closed the door after him and surveyed the conspirators with a bland smile on his sallow face.

A peculiar silence fell upon the recently voluble conspirators against his leadership.

"Gentlemen," said Lamar, after what seemed a wordless eternity, and fixing his eyes upon Calvin Cobb principally, "one

of the first instincts of the criminal—I might say the very first, for it is primordial—is a suspicion which is a commingling of distrust and fear.

"I have it myself—in a very remarkable degree—so remarkable that I invariably get it first. Gentlemen," and he smiled sweetly, "*I beat you to it!*"

The suave, easy, insinuating, insulting manner of the man, and the stare of his basilisk eyes, stirred the furies in the nervous Cobb. It was the first time such a thing happened in the ranks. Cobb flashed a revolver in Lamar's face, and he said, hoarse with rage:

"Look 'e here, Lamar. Cut it out, or I'll blow your brains against that wall-paper!"

There was absolute stillness, broken only by Cobb's spasmodic breathing. David Lamar was still smiling.

The telephone-bell rang sharply. Every one started, including Cobb, but he did not lower the weapon. David Lamar stepped forward as if the telephone were of greater importance than a hot-tempered bullet, and took the receiver from the hook.

"Yes?" said he, with all the old butlerian softness.

Cobb dropped the revolver on the table with a curse. It was impossible to shoot a man who was innocently conversing over the telephone.

Suddenly Lamar hung up the receiver and faced the syndicate.

"Detective Schroeder, of Central Office, wishes to come up-stairs," said he coolly.

"Good Lord!" gasped Cobb. "Don't let him in!"

"You're a fool," said Lamar. "He's got to come in. We must find out what the police want with us. Also, dear Calvin, it is Mr. St. Cloud he wishes to interview."

"Me!" gasped the social Maurice.

"Keep cool," said David. "Probably only an inquiry about the necklace—how and where you found it. There may be suspicion about how it got away, but not about how it was returned. You're safe. Please be indignant.

"Fennell—Cobb—Gough—Miles," said Lamar from the door, "I would advise you to keep out of sight."

Two minutes later, as Maurice St. Cloud, that society bachelor, sat dreaming of possible conjugal bliss before the open fire, his faithful butler, David, announced:

"Mr. Daniel Schroeder."

"Fortunately," said St. Cloud with acidity, "I had not yet retired. What does this intrusion mean?"

"Sorry, sir," said the heavy, large-footed man, "but it's about that necklace—just a few inquiries. Doesn't concern you, of course, but there's been a lot of light-handed work going on among the Four Hundred. Just where did you pick it up?"

"Oh," said St. Cloud. "Hope you don't think I stole it?"

The detective laughed at the sally.

"David," said St. Cloud, turning lazily to the butler, "in bringing the tray, just add a glass. You will join me while we talk?" he added generously, turning to the detective.

Fifteen minutes later St. Cloud pressed a button, and presently David Lamar showed the detective to the elevator.

"Good night," said the detective gruffly.

"Good night, sir," said the butler civilly.

CHAPTER VI.

AT THE HOUR OF NOON.

BOTH Ezra Miles and Calvin Cobb had an early breakfast (prepared by themselves, for the butler was asleep with a revolver under his pillow), and left the house before any of the other members of the syndicate were about.

Mr. St. Cloud came to breakfast alone some time later. Strictly speaking, he came to the breakfast-table. Finding nothing there that was worthy of attention, and being averse to domestic pursuits himself, he dressed and went to Belmonti's for his morning repast.

Gough did not turn up at all. Later in the day David Lamar, making a quiet skirmish through the bedrooms, discovered that Mr. Gough's bed had not been slept in. That, of course, was Mr. Gough's business, although it might also pertain to Lamar's.

Fennell came to breakfast quite late. He was attired in a bath-robe. His late butler sat down to bacon and eggs with him. David was in a pleasant humor. Fennell's mood was thoughtful and not altogether pleasant.

David's manner was a mixture of the old butlerian servitude, with a willingness to meet Fennell half-way. When Lamar offered to make the coffee it was a com-

promise between the butler's obligation and a good fellow's willingness to help out an irregular breakfast.

"Until we get a butler," said Lamar from the pantry, "we'll all have to make up our minds to lend a hand at this domestic business."

Fennell noticed that he said nothing about a *new* butler or *another* butler. When David brought in the coffee-pot and sat down at the table, Fennell was studying the front page of the *Chronicle.*

Suddenly Bayard Fennell's face quickened in expression. He leaned a trifle nearer the paper, with curled-up eyebrows. Then he flashed a keen glance at Lamar—a glance that was half of wonder and half admiration.

"Lamar?" said he.

"My dear Fennell," said David, inelegantly spearing a piece of toast with a fork.

"It's Vandewater's strong-room, of course. Your offhand suggestions didn't blind me. But I must say I don't see how this came about."

"What?" said Lamar quickly.

"Unless, of course, you gave Gough some private instructions," said Fennell, laying the front page of the *Chronicle* under Lamar's eyes.

David Lamar looked. The speared toast hung in mid air. Then it was slowly lowered and left, with the fork in it, lying on the table-cover. Lamar's eyes dilated ever so slightly as he read, in bold banked head-lines:

LORENZO VANDEWATER

Found Dead in Ramapo Woods.

For a moment an unbelieving light stole across Lamar's face. Then he sprang to his feet with an oath that sounded strangely on his gentle tongue. He seized the paper and crushed it in his hands.

Next moment he was walking up and down the room, his eyes blazing with rage, his face pallid, and his lips working in fierce chagrin over his half-bared teeth.

"Luck! Luck! Ill-luck!" he snarled. "I'd give my two eyes if this hadn't happened. *He's* beat *me* by dying. He doesn't know it, but I do. I pay! I lose! Oh, curse the miserable luck!"

The outburst was utterly inexplicable to Fennell.

"Gough overdid his instructions?" he suggested.

Lamar turned and glared at him.

"Gough! Gough! Who's Gough? What the devil has Gough to do with it?"

"Oh," said Fennell, with a note of apology. "I thought, as the others were spreading a net for Vandewater, Gough might be on the same trail, too."

For a quarter of a minute Lamar stared at Fennell. The man who kidnaped the Sultan of Salivat never lost his nerve, and it was one of the few times on record when he lost his temper. But suddenly he became his seemingly meek, quiet self again. He laid down the crushed newspaper, propping it against a sugar-bowl. Then he sat down, rescued the discarded toast, deliberately buttered a piece of it, and proceeded calmly with his breakfast while he read the details of the sudden death of Lorenzo Vandewater.

"Spoils your trick, doesn't it?" said Fennell, with a tinge of malicious satisfaction.

Lamar chipped the top off an egg, and went on reading.

It appeared, from the *Chronicle* story, which was borne out by the stories in all the other morning papers, that Mr. Vandewater, who had been working like a Trojan over the formation of Amalgamated Rubber—a trust that bade fair to control the rubber output of the world—had left Wall Street early in the day for his country residence at Pineridge, in the Ramapo hills.

Mr. Vandewater's friends, to whom he had mentioned that he was tired, smiled, for it was an annual performance, this tired feeling on the eve of the opening of the opera season. Vandewater, unlike his wife, hated the show of society. He was fond of opera but abhorred the pageant of the opening night and the unremitting stars of the lorgnette. His friends smiled.

But it was only too true that the financial genius had suffered the penalty of superhuman mental strain. When he arrived at Pineridge he partook of some light refreshment, then went off for a lone walk in the woods that surround his country residence.

It grew dark and he did not return. When his absence became alarming, a search-party scoured the woods. Mr. Vandewater was found huddled up at the foot of a big elm. He was quite dead — apparently from heart failure.

David Lamar laid the paper aside and went on eating with seeming unconcern.

But he thoughtfully regarded each piece of food before he thrust it into his mouth. An idea was tapping at the doors of his fertile brain.

They had breakfasted late, and it was eleven o'clock before Fennell and Lamar thrust back their chairs. Fennell offered Lamar a cigar.

"Thanks, no," said Lamar absently, "I never smoked in my life."

He sat down at the vacant fireplace and stared at the gray-brown, unlit asbestos "logs." The idea quickened in his sea-hued eyes.

Half an hour later Dudley Gough walked in, carrying a satchel. Lamar eyed him sharply. The literary criminal smiled and emptied the satchel's contents upon the breakfast-table.

"I haven't counted, but I fancy it is correct," said Gough, conscious of dramatic effect.

On the table lay a pile of small packages — some green, some yellow. There was a preponderance of one-hundred-dollar bills, although other packages contained fifties and twenties.

"Under the circumstances," said Gough airily, "I thought it best to refuse a check."

"Of course," said Lamar softly, "no intellectual criminal would commit *murder.*"

"Of course not," said Gough. "It argues a lack of genuine talent."

Fennell was leaning forward, trying to fathom what was going on between the two men. How much in mutual understanding were they? How much had Lamar to do with this? What had happened anyway?

"Well?" said Lamar, nodding toward the newspaper beside the money. "How did you do it?"

Gough seemed a little crestfallen.

"How did you know? Oh, I see—guessing. It was perfectly simple. As one of the gentlemen of the press, I was informed of Vandewater's death some hours before the market opened. Of course, you are aware that Amalgamated Rubber was soaring, but that only Vandewater's genius and personality held the combine together.

"With his death there must be an inevitable collapse—at least temporary.

"It is unfortunate in the case of being preinformed to have no capital," Gough continued. "But one has friends, such as Henry Gaige, of Selwyn. Gaige was naturally grateful for the information an hour before the market opened.

"Amalgamated Rubber closed last night at 30. It opened this morning at 25 and dropped by big jumps to 9 in the first half hour of trading. About 20,000 shares of Amalgamated Rubber were dropped, and the estimable Gaige picked up 10,000 at an average of 15.

"Gaige cleared $150,000 on that one stock alone. Others were affected, and I am almost sorry now that I did not stipulate for a larger gratuity, for Gaige must have cleared half a million before Mr. Vandewater walked onto the floor of the stock exchange."

"Vandewater!" exclaimed Fennell, while David Lamar listened and watched Gough. "I thought you said he was dead!"

"Did I say so?" inquired Gough, with pretended astonishment. "Dear me, no. Mr. Vandewater isn't dead. Never was dead. I don't think he knew he was dead until he reached New York this morning. He has no telegraph or telephone at Pineridge. He does not even read newspapers out there.

"Of course, the stock leaped when he walked into 'Change, and there was a scene unrivalled in the history—"

"Yes, yes," said Lamar. He was smiling into the fireless asbestos logs. "But be so kind, dear Gough—I admit it was very clever, and $10,000 is a welcome contribution to syndicate expenses—but be so kind as not to stray into my preserves again without first consulting me. In the meantime, you have done well—better than you imagine."

Gough's vanity darkened in his face. But it lightened into a conceited smile when Fennell blurted out:

"How did you do it, Dudley?"

"Perfectly simple. The newspapers go to press, last edition about four o'clock in the morning. A piece of big news cannot be investigated at such an hour and would not be, where it came from a thoroughly reliable correspondent.

"The story, too, was made more plausible by the fact that it came through the Central News Agency, and every paper had the same story, down to the finest detail. The correspondent at Pineridge is one Westcott, a gentleman with a decided lisp, and who awoke this morning *after a full night's sleep* to find himself famous, and also—discharged!

"Of course, in time he will be able to prove a slumberous alibi, although it will

be somewhat difficult to explain the lisp on the long-distance telephone."

Gough suddenly chuckled and changed his voice to a high-pitched telephone falsetto with an admirable lisp thrown into it.

"Of courth," said he, "I don't thuppothe the Thentral Newthe main offith notithed any thlight differenth in the voithe in view of thuch sthupendous newthe!"

"It came, you see," added Gough, "at an hour when there was no time for question of any sort."

"M-m-m-m!" hummed Fennell, his eyes gleaming with admiration.

"I should say the afternoon papers will be admirable reading," was Lamar's comment. "But I suppose the hand that directed the maneuver covered up the finger-marks."

"Of course," said Gough, with assumed indifference. "If any suspicion attached to me, I was in the *Chronicle* office at 2:30 o'clock this morning, after leaving here and before I took the last train to Pineridge. The only possible connection is through Henry Gaige, and Gaige would hardly talk of the matter."

"Hardly," said Lamar. "Thank you. You have done very well." He glanced at his watch. "It lacks three minutes of noon. I am afraid—"

The elevator door opened and shut in the hall. There came a rush of footsteps and Calvin Cobb collided with the interior of the dining-room. Cobb's face was white and he was perspiring in a way that suggested pain more than nervousness. His right arm was suspended in a large, black silk handkerchief and the hand which peeped from the front of the sling was tightly bound with French lint.

He hardly looked at the other three. With his left hand he pushed something inside the sling. A large, triangular brown mass of stone slid out from behind his arm and fell on the table with a crash.

"There's the tablet!" he gasped. "Would one of you fellows mind giving my arm a jerk forward. It's dislocated."

Lamar leaped to his feet and looked into Cobb's face, while he felt the shoulder-joint.

"Too bad," said he, giving the shoulder a forward jerk.

"Harder!" said Cobb grimly.

The shoulder-joint slipped into place with a deadened cluck.

"Thanks," said Cobb, pulling off the silk sling and the lint, and beginning to limber up the arm. "Funny thing. I bandaged and slung the arm first and got the reason afterward.

"Coming out of the institution with the tablet in the sling, the only fellow who suspected me asked what was the matter with my arm. He insisted on pulling my shoulder one way while I strenuously insisted on going the other.

"Scared? Gee-whiz!

"But I got away—through the park, with the blamed thing pulling on my twisted shoulder like I was carrying the obelisk. Saw Ezra Miles offering his thumb to an infant on one of the drives. If he got away with it, the credit's mine, for nurse-maids, policemen, and paper-hookers—the whole population of Central Park—seemed to be after me!

"But, anyhow!" Cobb turned his eyes upon David. "There's the stone, Mr. Lamar. How about it?"

Lamar came forward and bent in a ruminating attitude over the stone.

"To think," said he absently, "that over three thousand years ago, some industrious Babylonian or Chaldean or Assyrian, with a high, peaked hat with flaps over his ears, tooled out his little yarn on this chunk of baked clay."

Cobb began to show signs of nervousness. Lamar, intently studying the tablet, seemed to be deliberately slighting him and his courageous feat.

"It's really only a copy," mused David, "and not complete, part of the Gilgamish epic, I should think, and made by one of Asshurbanipal's scribes."

He continued to gaze at the cuneiform inscription. Then presently he began to translate:

Reed house, listen. Wall, hear: Man from Shurippak, son of Ubar-Tutu; Construct a house. Build a ship. Part with riches. Seek—

"Oh, thunder!" burst from Cobb's overwrought feelings. "You're not the whole wisdom of the universe. I could translate that thing backward. Had nothing else to do when I lugged the blamed brick from Nippur to Port Saïd where some son of a cleptomaniac swiped it out of my room!"

"That was why I was so interested," said Lamar, smiling. "It's the same. 'Twas I stole it from you at Port Saïd, Cobb. Ever try fine tweezers from the outside on a key

that is in the lock from the inside? I wondered if it could be the same."

"*You*—did it!" exclaimed Cobb.

"Why, yes," said Lamar, still gazing interestedly at the tablet. "No ill-feeling, of course. Crippen disposed of it to one of Vandewater's agents. Ever meet Crippen? Curious sort of fellow."

Cobb's eyes began to blaze, and the perspiration started from his face.

"Seems a shame, doesn't it," Lamar went on musingly, "that we—you and I, Cobb—should steal the same stone over again. It's kind of unfair. I've half a mind to send it back—"

"Not if I have to smash the thing over your frozen skull!" shouted Cobb, "and look 'e here, *Mister* Lamar—"

David looked up slowly with that expression of annoyance and pain which Fennell had seen once—and had reason to remember. Gough and St. Cloud for the moment watched the two men as expectantly as the old leader did.

But again the seemingly inevitable conflict between Lamar and the dynamic Cobb was averted. Ezra Miles came in quietly, bringing with him an air of stolid calm, strongly impregnated with vile tobacco-smoke.

"H-r-m-m-m-p-h!" he grunted through tension. "Boy's safe. Thanks, Cobb. Have to be arrested, though. Police waiting for me at permanent address number four. Goo'-by!"

Putting the dirty clay pipe between his teeth, the stoic started for the door again, while a silence of dismay reigned over four of the other five men in the room.

"Splendid!" burst from the lips of David Lamar in a startling way. "Now we'll proceed to business!"

CHAPTER VII.

LAMAR UNFOLDS.

"ONE minute, Ezra!" said Lamar, as the stoic was about to pass out.

"M-m-m-m-p-h?" said Miles interrogatively.

"But it's for the good of the cause, I take it?"

"Better little arrest now than big arrest after," said Ezra.

"A good maxim for all gentlemen of the persuasion," said Lamar, smiling. "No man is ever arrested twice for the same offense. The cases loses merit with the first discharge."

"How long have you got?"

"Would like to be arrested right away," said Ezra thoughfully, "but, of course," he added, his big, hamlike face brightening, "police must wait till I get to permanent address four."

"Where's the boy?"

"At three," was the reply. "Healthy baby. Doesn't squall. Old woman bathe and feed. Got his own bottle with him."

"Good!" said Lamar, and for the first time it seemed as if the expressionless face was about to expand into a humorous grin.

"Very well," Lamar went on presently, "you can spare fifteen or twenty minutes.

"We're all here. Having satisfied myself of your criminal aptitude and your possibilities for more than elemental things, I wish to outline something worth while."

On the instant every one, especially Cobb and Fennell, were at keen attention. Lamar was now going to show his hand. He was going to reveal the scheme which was to put the Sheba necklace feat, the theft of the flood tablet, the kidnaping of Vandewater's baby, and Gough's Wall Street coup, in the shade. He was going to outline what he considered something worth while!

"First of all," said Lamar, "I must compliment you on some of the things you have done. Won't you sit down, gentlemen?

"It may not be known to all of you that for years I have kept what might be called a Criminal Who's Who. In it I have entered from time to time the names, aliases, addresses, likely whereabouts, and past performances of every notable gentleman of the persuasion in the world.

"A strange but useful hobby which I recommend for your idle hours.

"Cobb, to your clever acquisition of the Gainsborough from a London shop-window and your hold-up of the Wall Street messenger, I must really add your adventures with the Babylonian cuneiform tablet.

"The incident of the Sheba necklace must be entered to the credit of the gentleman who cleaned out young Clanronald on the Epsom field, while I must add Amalgamated Rubber to the biography of the estimable author of 'Cold Bluff.'

"As for Miles, I will let his best record stand with the robbery of the Golden State Limited. The kidnaping of a baby was not a test, but merely a detail in a larger scheme. Besides, with all due respect to the other

members of the syndicate, I have already tested Ezra Miles—in other days—and I did not care to risk his liberty unnecessarily. Our friend Ezra, gentlemen, is a very valuable asset, and is through with the nursery.

"Coming to my scheme," he continued, "we all must admit that the field of criminal enterprise is pretty thoroughly exhausted. But it is, always was, and always will be a fact that there is still one feat that nobody else has ever thought to do, or dared to do, or could do.

"You may think that I am about to propose that we rob the United States Treasury. Not at all. The Treasury is merely a bank, and it is safer to rob a dozen smaller banks and quite as remunerative.

"We might possibly hold up an outbound transatlantic liner, carrying bullion or several hundred wealthy Americans about to see Paris and expire. But high-sea piracy is out-of-date, and the expenses are too high. Besides, there is the drawback of a necessary crew. Works of Babel lead sooner or later to the house of silence.

"Gentlemen, we are practical business men," Lamar went on. "We can safely leave our dramatic values to such as the literary Gough. Let us stick to practical values.

"Gold is safe, but heavy. Anybody can steal gold. Jewels are scarce and hard to get at. Our friend Cobb might steal the Institute's collection of uncut samples—"

Cobb started and began to grow moist.

"—but it would be so much better, if on the trail of gems, to do the same thing in the largest possible scale. I am going to do that, and in making the largest haul of gems ever accomplished, I mean to get away with a loot that is more fabulously valuable than gems.

"While the invaluable is usually *un*valuable to the criminal, it is a fact that the invaluable can be priced at will if held to ransom against the person or nation to which the invaluable article originally belonged, and to which it still morally belongs as an historic heirloom.

"For instance, the Star of Bethlehem, the most perfect diamond in the world, was almost a sacred relic among the Christians of unchristian Persia. It was said to have been found after the star that guided the wise men disappeared from the eastern sky. It was believed to have been the Star of Bethlehem fallen to earth.

"It was stolen from the Christians by an ancient Shah, who feared its influence against Mohammedanism. It was safely kept away from the Christians for centuries. Then it vanished. I think my friend Crippen, of Cairo, had a finger in the pie. They are still searching for that stone, and massacring Christians while searching. There is an ancient prophecy that, with the recovery of that gem by the Christians, Christianity would triumph over Mohammedanism.

"Gentlemen, that precious stone is in this city. The Star of Bethlehem alone would be priceless — which means of immense value—to the Shah of Persia and the Mohammedan Empire if we could restore it.

"But where it lies there are other treasures which were brought together by means which would not always stand scrutiny, and which could be restored to their proper owners at great ransom.

"What, for instance, would England give for the return of the Golden Gospels of Henry the Eighth? What would France give for the return of the original manuscripts of Dumas, Zola, and letters written to the Duc de Guise by Mary Queen of Scots? And, speaking of the Scots, what would Scotland offer for the return of the original manuscript of Burns's 'Cottar's Saturday Night'?

"They are all in this city, side by side with the Star of Bethlehem, side by side with priceless heirlooms that strangely vanished from Asiatic courts, European museums, and—" with a smile at Cobb— "from London art-shop windows and institute tables."

Lamar paused for a moment. Ezra looked stupefied. Gough was smiling. Fennell was leaning forward, listening and watching with upcurled brows, as if he, too, perceived a light. Strangely enough, Cobb seemed to understand fully. He was leaning back in his chair, perspiring freely and trying to whistle a silly tune.

"To come to the point, gentlemen," said Lamar. "Where are those treasures? They are in the possession of a man who, besides being the richest and most powerful person in the United States, is the greatest art collector in the world.

"The man is Lorenzo Vandewater, whose art possessions, kept in a windowless, steel-doored, steel-walled, electric-girdled, sentry-guarded treasure-house, are as dazzling, as rare, and as fabulously valuable as Solomon's.

"We, gentlemen, are going to loot that treasure-house, steal the best items of that collection, and ransom each treasure to its original country, its original owner."

Fennell shook his head doubtfully.

"Impossible," said Gough, with the air of one who has pondered the matter.

"Convict number 4-11-44!" murmured Cobb prophetically.

"Speaking of Solomon," said St. Cloud, drawling, "I suppose, Mr. Lamar, you are aware that the Sheba necklace came from the steel-walled, electric-girdled treasure-house?"

"Certainly," said Lamar. "Otherwise I shouldn't have asked you to steal it and put it back. I shall expect you to take advantage of Mrs. Vandewater's invitation and report back to me without delay some plan of the house interior."

"I may tell you, gentlemen," said Lamar earnestly, "this is no child's play like filching babies, necklaces, and deluge tablets, or publishing canards upon the stock-market. This—"

"Look here, Lamar," interrupted Fennell roughly, "it cannot be done."

"I shall show you when it is done," said Lamar. "You forget my motto—*Ad astra per aspera!*"

"It will read the other way about," said Fennell ironically. "Bolts and bars first and the stars after."

"Look 'e here," said Cobb, waking up. "I know as much about what's in that private museum as you do. Take, for example, the Gaekwar Ruby. It's there. There's nothing like it in the world. To offer that for sale would be to have stolen the rope to hang yourself."

"The Gaekwar of Baranhal will pay and ask no questions," said Lamar. "It was stolen from him, and he is rich."

"Do you think you could sell Mohammed's sword?" jeered Cobb.

"Assuredly," said Lamar coolly. "I—My friend Crippen—holds an offer of five thousand lire from the Mad Mullah of Somaliland, who thinks he is the reincarnation of Mohammed."

Cobb fell silent. Fennell began to think that Lamar was the author of a scheme which seemed wildly improbable of execution and result only to those who had not had time to think it over.

"Well," said he, "how are you going to proceed to business?"

"I shall be in a better position to outline the next move after I have consulted with Mr. Vandewater," said David.

Even Ezra Miles started. Then the old stoic grinned. It was so like the Lamar of other days.

"You're going to call on Vandewater," somebody said, with a hysterical catch in the utterance.

"Of course," put in Gough, with acumen. "Coercion. He has the baby."

"You misjudge me, Gough," said Lamar. "I never resort to that sort of coercion. In fact, I was about to say to you, Ezra, that as soon as you are arrested and discharged—I presume you have arranged to be discharged—please return the baby to the spot in the park where you picked it up. You, too, will then call upon Mr. Vandewater and demand compensation for unjust arrest. Report to me what your eyes see in or around that house.

"As for the Babylonian tablet," continued Lamar, turning to Cobb, "I think—"

"I'll be hanged if I will," said Cobb quite sullenly.

"You mean jailed if you do," said David lightly. "I was about to say that I shall return the Babylonian tablet to Mr. Vandewater in person. It's his, you know.

"And Fennell," concluded Lamar, unheeding Cobb's amazement and the complete mystification of the others, "I am going to present Mr. Vandewater with the renowned Tiger's Eye.

"May I trouble you for the keys of your safe."

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. CRIPPEN, OF CAIRO.

THE ordinary mortal would have found it difficult to understand how any man, who was as blessed by fortune as Lorenzo Vandewater, could ever get up of a morning at odds with the world.

The Vandewater residence faced the Hudson on Riverside Drive. It was in the Georgian style and done in white marble. The lawn that skirted the front of the house deepened into a fountained, grassy, flowery quadrangle between the residence and a long, one-story building to the right. This latter building provided food for speculation among those who were unacquainted with its purpose and use.

At first glance it suggested a refined prison. Or it might have been the particu-

lar department of a high-class sanatorium where they confined rich but violent maniacs. As a matter of fact, it was the vast strong-room in which Lorenzo Vandewater, the richest and greatest art collector in the world, stored his treasures, culled from all countries and from all ages.

High up near the eaves were small, oblong, steel-barred windows. The only other apparent inlet to the house was a massive bronze door of Italian sixteenth-century style, which opened onto the lawn and the drive.

It was generally known, however, that this door was seldom used. Few persons had ever been permitted into the treasure-house. Vandewater himself, who was said to spend lone nights with his treasures, as a miser might with his gold, made his entrances and exits by a tunnel under the lawn—a tunnel that began in his study on the ground floor of the residence and ended at a private steel door in the solid wall of the treasure-house.

It is unnecessary to say anything of Vandewater personally, except that his diverse characteristics were the despair of those who opposed him in finance, organization, or the pursuit of his collecting hobby. He was a genius, not in one particular direction, but in everything he essayed. It was not merely because his name was Lorenzo that enthusiasts likened him to Lorenzo de Medici and spoke of him as "the Magnificent."

Yes, it would be hard for the ordinary mortal to believe that an individual so fortunate could get out of bed at odds with the world. But Vandewater did on the morning after the Wall Street canard.

As he came out of the bedroom which adjoined the study, he was obviously in an ill temper. He paid not the slightest attention to the elegant breakfast which had been brought to him on a tray. He went straight to a small desk and procured a black cigar of almost ridiculous size.

This he smoked furiously until his mood quieted down. Then he puffed leisurely, while his small, keen eyes studied the pattern of the exquisite Armenian rug at his feet.

The Wall Street matter was irritating, but it was over. Yet it was one of the minor matters that, taken altogether, conspired to his ill mood.

The canard was the work of some organized aggression. He had proof of that in the fact that less than twenty-four hours before his only child—a boy of two years—had been kidnaped from its nurse in the park. The child was still missing.

The matter did not impress Vandewater greatly. He supposed that it was an attempt at extortion. The kidnapers would hold the child safe on that account. As for the child itself, it would suffer none of the pangs of parental absence. Vandewater might have passed it in the street and would not have been aware that it was his own flesh and blood. He felt some consolation in the fact that the kidnaping might awaken his estimable wife to a consciousness of her past remissness with regard to the child. Mrs. Vandewater knew as much about the child as he did.

This morning she was prostrated, which somehow amused Lorenzo the Magnificent.

But that was all the amusement in the situation. Thirty-six hours before the first stroke of that mysterious organized aggression had descended. The matter of the Sheba necklace and its inexplicable return was not such a mystery to Vandewater, although he could not as yet perceive the purpose behind the return of the invaluable string of jewels.

But there was a purpose—the same purpose that lay behind the Wall Street canard, the kidnaping of the child, and, lastly, the matter of the theft from the Institute of the Babylonian tablet.

"I can only wait," he mused. "Developments are inevitable, and—we'll see."

A hushed telephone-bell tinkled near him. He answered the call. It was the commissioner of police. He wished to inform Mr. Vandewater at the earliest possible moment that the child had been found. It had been discovered lying on the grass not ten yards from the pathway where it had disappeared. The police would have been inclined to think, said the commissioner, that the child had fallen from its little coach and been there all night but for the fact that it was sucking a bottle which had obviously been recently refilled.

"What about the man who was arrested yesterday?"

"The man Meltzer?" said the commissioner. "He has been discharged. He established a fairly good character, and it seems that he is a sort of fairy godfather to the babies in the park. They call him the 'candy man.' As a matter of fact, sir, he is a half-witted person with a crazy fondness for children."

"Certain evidence of insanity," said Vandewater dryly. "I wish, Mr. Commissioner, you would send that man to me. I do not wish any one to suffer unjust detention on my account. Send him to me here."

As Vandewater hung up the receiver he became aware that a woodenlike figure in livery was awaiting his pleasure.

"Well?"

"There is a person, sir, at the door who wishes to see you, sir. He says his name is Crippen, and that you will know who he is. I told him—"

"What is his first name—his full name?"

"'Mr. J. Crippen,' he said, sir—'of Cairo,' he said. I told him—"

"Send him in here," interrupted Vandewater quickly.

"Yes, sir. Certainly, sir. Beg pardon, sir, but he is not what you accustom yourself to receive. He— Begging your pardon, sir—I only wish to—"

Vandewater leveled a pair of beady eyes upon the menial, who read his orders and proceeded at once to their execution.

"Have Mrs. Helmar," said Vandewater, as the menial walked toward the door, "inform Mrs. Vandewater that the baby has been found and is safe."

"Yes, sir."

Vandewater sat still, but his eyes were turned from the rug to the doorway. There was an expectant look on his face, as if the person he anticipated was one whom he had long looked forward to seeing.

There was reason for his anticipation and curiosity. At last he was to see the man who, more than all others, was responsible for the acquisition of his greatest treasures. Mr. Crippen, of Cairo, had been the last resort and stand-by of Vandewater's numerous European and Asiatic agents.

Crippen was a wonderful man. He had performed almost the impossible at times. It was Crippen who got—Heaven only knew how—the Star of Bethlehem from the Shah of Persia; it was Crippen who got the Golden Dragon from the forbidden city of Peking; it was Crippen who got the Gaekwar ruby; it was Crippen who acquired Nero's cup; it was Crippen who—

Would the man look like his own cleverness, devil-daring, and enterprise?

Yet Vandewater did not expect a hard-eyed adventurer. He had never seen Crippen, and did not know he was this side of Malta; but he had heard things about the man's personality—how he was a little man, very harmless-looking and really very harmless; a man who had no capacity for anything but his particular business, about which he knew everything there was to know, even to the present whereabouts of things that were coveted, but could not possibly be obtained—unless, perhaps, through Mr. Crippen.

Mr. Crippen entered. Vandewater arose to his feet. His face was aglow with enthusiasm. Instantly the mood of the morning was gone. Upon the moment he forgot his diverse troubles—business and domestic. He was at once the devotee of antiquities and art objects, and the high priest of that hobby stood before him.

There was nothing very imposing about the high priest, with whom Mr. Vandewater silently but warmly shook hands. Even Vandewater must have experienced a slight shock. No more shabby or insignificant person had ever crossed the threshold of the Magnificent's house.

Mr. Crippen, of Cairo, may have been medium-sized, but he had the stoop of feeble physique. He was narrow-shouldered, thin-haired, and wofully lean. His sallow face and ill-nourished complexion were in perfect keeping with his loose jaw and slack lips. His weak, childlike eyes were made weaker in expression by a pair of old-fashioned horned-rimmed spectacles.

Mr. Crippen had all the earmarks of the genteel but poverty-stricken dealer in rusty relics. His shoes had not seen blacking for some time; his trousers were baggy in front of the knees and wrinkled behind them. His vest was stained, and it was glossy on the crease-ridges, while an old, faded black coat, which came short at the sleeves, hung from his rounded shoulders like a garment on a scarecrow.

"Are you Mr. Crippen?" asked Vandewater, overlooking everything but the fact that this was Crippen, of Cairo.

"Such is my misfortune, Mr. Vandewater," said Mr. Crippen, in a quavering, nervous voice.

He turned in almost comic apprehension toward the door. He took a step or two in the direction of the exit, two or three back to Vandewater, then headed in an uncertain way for the door again.

"He—he took my—my valise," said Mr. Crippen anxiously.

Vandewater smiled and pressed a button.

"Bring Mr. Crippen's valise," said he sharply to the bomb-suspecting footman.

"It has something of value—very peculiar value—in it," said Mr. Crippen, with a ghost of a smile, as the footman went off for the grip.

"Mr. Crippen, you are a very wonderful man," said Vandewater. "I am indebted to you for a great deal. I would welcome you even more—if that were possible—did you bring me what you brought to my agent at Port Saïd four years ago?"

Mr. Crippen adjusted his spectacles, scratched his chin, adjusted his spectacles again, and hummed thoughtfully:

"Port Saïd—four years ago— Ah, the Chaldean tablet!"

"Babylonian," Vandewater corrected. "You are aware that it was stolen from the Institute of Natural History yesterday morning, I suppose?"

Mr. Crippen gave a start. Then he raised both his wrinkled, ungainly, large-knuckled hands.

"Stolen!" he gasped. "Dear me! How fortunate! I thought as much. How fortunate!"

"Fortunate?" queried Vandewater.

"How fortunate they brought it to me, and—"

He took the valise from the footman, opened it, and extracted the Babylonian tablet, which he laid on the table.

"That I brought it to you."

Vandewater stared, then burst out with:

"How, in the name of Heaven—"

But he stopped, and surveyed with admiration the miserable specimen of a man who had wrought this wonderful conjuring feat. It was surprising; but this was Crippen, of Cairo—the miracle-worker in the matter of producing historic relics that were lost, stolen, or strayed.

"Perhaps you can tell me how you got it?" said Vandewater.

Mr. Crippen looked unhappy on the instant. He began tweaking his finger-tips in embarrassment, and seemed to blush.

"I—I—" he stammered. "You see—I make it a rule—my success is due—I never ask questions that might involve me—or the parties—"

"I understand," said Vandewater quickly, "the secret of your success. You 'speak no evil; no, nor listen to it.'"

"Exactly," said Mr. Crippen, vastly relieved. "Still—pardon me if I seem unlike myself. I—I am very much astonished to find— In fact, this explains much—this information about the theft. It warns me that I was right to be on guard and—and to come to you."

"I don't quite understand," said Vandewater.

Mr. Crippen pulled himself together. He went and closed the study-door, which led into the hall. When he came back he seemed more collected in manner.

"Mr. Vandewater," said he, "it is very unusual for me to speak of the comings and goings in my—my shop—I have a little shop in Fourth Avenue — I have a little shop everywhere—I go from one to the other as clues lead me—I was saying. What was I saying, Mr. Vandewater?"

"That you did not gossip," said Vandewater tersely.

"Ah, yes—yes. But the circumstances are unusual, and warrant me— That is why I came to you. What you have said explains—"

"Yes?"

"I see it all now," mused Crippen, much to the exasperation of Vandewater. "The man who stole it—did he have his arm in a sling?"

"He had," said Vandewater, leaning forward interestedly.

"That's Cobb — surely. That's Cobb. He stole it before. It was from him I got it at Port Saïd.

"Yes, yes," went on Mr. Crippen, in an absent kind of way. "I thought I had seen him before. Probably nothing the matter with his arm. They do that, you know, so the police will look for a man with a broken arm, or in a sling. Nothing the matter with his arm."

Vandewater had extracted a little red memorandum-book from a pigeonhole of his study-desk. He turned to the letter C.

"Cobb, Calvin," he read. "The same man who stole the Gainsborough seven years ago?"

"Yes, yes. He stole the Gainsborough—now in the Hebard collection. But there is something strange here."

"How?"

"I will tell you," said Crippen uneasily. "That's why I came to you—not to bring the stone. There's something more. He came into my shop this morning, Cobb did. I had just taken the shutters down. He laid the tablet on the counter. This was the bag it was in. He didn't open it. Just laid it on the counter.

"He asked me how deluge tablets ranged in the market. He is a very inelegant person,

this Mr. Cobb. I said it depended upon the tablet, and was about to take it from the grip when—

"Mr. Cobb became very agitated. He was glancing at the window, and his hand was laid on mine, preventing my opening the bag.

"There was a man looking in at my window. He may have been attracted by my curios. But I think not. He was a plain-clothes man. I know the type well—very respectable for a man of laboring build, with a bushy mustache and hands in his pockets to indicate that he never, *never* wore a frock uniform coat."

Mr. Crippen smiled dully at his own perspicacity, and went on:

"Across the street was another man, looking toward the shop. I saw him make a signal with his hand. Then Cobb looked frightened. He is a man who is very easily frightened. He perspired freely. Mr. Cobb always does that, Mr. Vandewater.

"He walked out of the shop and hurried away, leaving the bag and the tablet on my counter. I did not touch it—did not lay a finger on it while the man remained at the window. When he went away I felt sure he had merely been looking at my curios. Then I opened the bag, and recognized the tablet as one that must have been stolen from you.

"I have brought it back to you, Mr. Vandewater, and please do not thank me. You have been a very kind patron."

Vandewater leaned back in his chair and studied Crippen. He was convinced that the man was telling the absolute truth, although, of course, Crippen, of Cairo, was a natural enigma. His story seemed perfectly plausible, and presently he would probably come to the true purpose of his visit.

"Did you recognize the other man?" Vandewater asked, by way of encouragement. "The man across the street?"

Mr. Crippen began to tremble.

"*Yes—I did!*" he said, almost in a whisper. "It was a man I would know anywhere. It was the greatest criminal on earth. It was—"

He just barely breathed the name.

Vandewater frowned and reached for the little red book. He turned to the letter I, and read:

Ishkander—Halim, alias Captain Relampago, alias Tomaso Espinosa, alias David Lamar—held daughter of Nikolas Kallas to ransom; held Sultan of Salivat and obtained jewels; stole Star of Bethlehem, etc., etc. Was crucified 1901, at Lhasa, after attempt to steal the Tiger's Eye.

"That man is reported dead," said Vandewater.

"Impossible!" said Mr. Crippen. "It was from him, personally, I bought this tablet at Port Said. He stole it from Cobb, who stole it from Schimmel. That was four years ago, and—"

"Then," exclaimed Vandewater, his eyes suddenly aglow with a hobbyist's hope. "He may have procured the famous Tiger's Eye if he escaped Lhasa. Crippen, get me that stone, even if it costs—"

"One moment," said Mr. Crippen excitedly. "You cannot have it. He got it—yes, he got it! He lost it in Calcutta. He is determined to get it back.

"Oh, Mr. Vandewater, why are such treasures of the past, such legacies of history and time bandied about by the mercenary and the wicked? Why can they not be placed in safekeeping—the keeping of one who loves them—not for their worth, but for their glory and association?

"This is what they are to you, and to me, Mr. Vandewater; but I have no place to keep such things. It is pleasure to me to bring them to your agents, for I know that they are safe in the temple which you have built in their honor—a mausoleum of the ages!

"My life is in your hands, Mr. Vandewater," he went on, with increasing terror in his manner and utterance. "They are here—Lamar, Cobb, the giant Miles, and the rest of the clever gang. It is the Tiger's Eye they want, not my miserable life, or this tablet. And they will have is unless—unless, Mr. Vandewater, it should be stated—say in the newspapers, Mr. Vandewater—that *you* have acquired the famous Tiger's Eye which was once a fetish of the forbidden temple at Lhasa."

Mr. Crippen's agitation overcame his dignity and his nerves. He dropped all at once upon his knees at the collector's feet.

"Oh, sir," he pleaded, almost hysterically, "save it from the hands of those notorious vandals!"

From a pocket of his shapeless coat he drew his closed fist and spread it open under Vandewater's eyes.

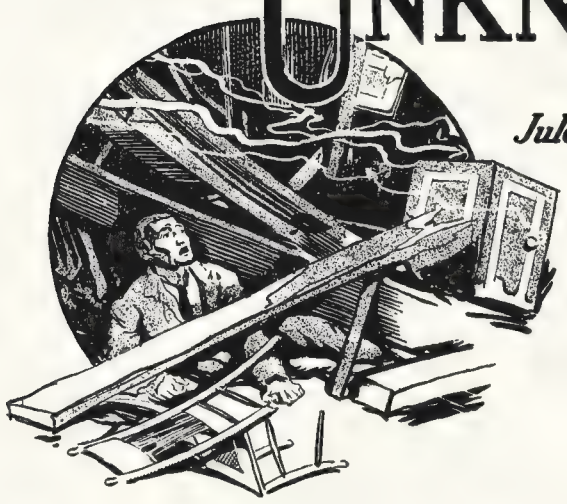
In the palm of it lay the great Tiger's Eye in all its sullen sinister sheen!

(To be continued.)

UNKNOWN

by

Jules Verne Des Voignes



HE had been sitting an hour in the bare little waiting-room, with its long leather seat against the wall opposite the door into the inner office, its square oak table set uncompromisingly in the middle of the brown matting, and its one chair, which he had discovered in a corner when he came in. The view from the windows was as uninteresting as the room; for they faced on a narrow and very dingy court, and directly across was the fifth story of an iron-shuttered warehouse.

The three men of assorted age, build, and dress who occupied the long leather seat claimed his notice on one account only—they were applicants for the position he wanted, and they were ahead.

It had been a full twenty minutes, he judged, since the fifth man had been called in his turn by a rather untidy and shrill-voiced office-boy; but no word had been passed to the waiting-room that the position had been filled. So, still hopeful that he would get to see the manager of the firm, he had fallen to amusing himself by comparing his own appearance with that of the others.

By careful elimination he had managed to spare enough money from the cost of actual necessities to have his best suit pressed; and his freshly laundered shirt, though he knew just where the very thin places in it came under his coat and waistcoat, was at least spotless, and his tie neat if cheap. The polish on his shoes helped wonderfully to hide the worn creases in the leather. He felt as respectable-looking as any of them—at all events, his dress could not detract from his real qualifications if he should have the chance to show them to the manager.

None of the other applicants had spoken to him, and he felt no inclination to speak to them. After a while, too, his whimsical comparisons of clothes grew a trifle monotonous as a pastime, and he was glad when the door into the corridor opened again. But his first glance was one of surprise. The newcomer was a woman—a very young woman, he decided the next instant, scarcely more than a girl. It had not occurred to him until then that a girl, or a woman, would want the position.

She stopped uncertainly, after closing the door, as if the dull half-light of the waiting-room momentarily blinded her. Unexpectedly, he realized that he had the only chair available, and that she might not care to sit down beside the other three men.

"Oh, no—please don't give up your seat!" she protested as he got up. But he insisted, with a frank smile in his gray eyes; and he noticed that she sank into it, tired and rather grateful, after all. As he sat down on the end of the long leather seat nearest her, he saw that there were only two out of the three men left. The third, evidently, had been called to the inner office by the shrill-voiced office-boy while he had been giving up his chair to the girl.

She seemed a girl in the perspective of his own hard experience and broken youth. Now that he had an opportunity of studying her at close range, he saw that she was small, and, even at that, a great deal more frail-looking than she ought to have been. There was, for one thing, an exaggerated touch of color in her cheeks which was not

at all in keeping with the whiteness of the rest of her face, though it might have been due, of course, to a natural nervousness at applying for the position, or embarrassment at finding herself in a roomful of men—or, perhaps, a little of both.

He was not much of a judge of feminine apparel, but her gray tailor-suit certainly looked grayer and thinner than it should have looked with not too long wear; and her hat—he wasn't quite sure, but it suggested a rather unavailing attempt at a remodeling to fit the style of head-gear he had noticed women wearing on the street.

He was still studying her surreptitiously, and turning a decision over in his head, when another applicant was called out. In a very few minutes, this time, the boy came back for the third; and the two of them were left alone.

With that, the waiting-room seemed to take on an atmosphere of much less publicity, and the thing he had been thinking about shaped itself into actual words. What he said first, however, was awkward and a long way from what he had in mind.

"It must be pretty hard for them to find what they want," he commented, with a touch of humor. "They've run through quite a job-lot of people already."

She smiled. There was the same tired effort in her smile that there was in her voice.

"I really didn't understand from their advertisement whether they would consider a woman or not," she admitted. "I just came to see."

"I don't know why they wouldn't," he said, debating the matter thoughtfully. "It's some kind of book work in the office, I think. You may be exactly the one they're looking for."

She looked surprised. "I thought you were an applicant?" she asked frankly.

"Well, it doesn't matter much about my getting this place," he lied easily. "I thought I'd come and find out what the position amounted to, and whether the manager looked amiable, and so on." He laughed. "There were a good many 'ifs' in the case, so it doesn't make much difference. I've been wondering since you came in why they wouldn't like a woman better than a man for the place, if the right one came along. Do you think you'd like the work?"

The hope which sprang in her eyes was unmistakable.

"I'm sure I'd like it, if it's anything the same as I've been doing," she said impulsively. His frank interest drew her on. "I've been with Selvin & Co., but about a month ago they sold out, and all they could do for me just then was to write me a good letter of recommendation. They were nice people. I've been with them ever since I came to the city."

"And that was?" he ventured.

She flushed. "It's almost a year now. You see"—she was lacing and unlacing her shabbily gloved hands in her lap—"it wasn't at all pleasant for me at home after mother died and father married again, and I thought I'd rather come away. Everything was all right as long as I was with Mr. Selvin's firm, but it seems a bad time of year now to find a new place, and perhaps I'm not quite used enough to city ways or—or something." She caught herself, as if she had just remembered that he was an utter stranger. "But I'm afraid they'd rather have a man for this position. Why," she tried to laugh, "how do you know they won't want you?"

He moved awkwardly, his gaze drawn again to the faded trimming on her hat.

"Oh, I'm not thinking of going in now," he answered. "I had something else in mind when I came, and I've about decided to accept it. I'd like to know, though, if they take you. I thought I'd wait till you'd seen the manager."

The friendliness in his tone covered its unsteadiness. He rose and walked over to the windows, as if it were all settled that she should come next and he had only to while away the time until he knew the result. It was a little easier for him, at that moment, not to have to meet her eyes.

"But I couldn't think really of taking your turn!" she declared. "You must have been waiting here a long time."

"It takes some people a good while to decide on what they want to do, you know," he said, turning around and coming slowly back. "I guess it's that way with me. You don't mind if I stay to see whether my theory's correct, do you—about their wanting a woman?"

"No—of course not. And it's very kind of you, but—" She stopped confusedly, and during the next minute neither of them spoke.

It was getting on in the afternoon, and the waiting-room, which evidently was never very light at any time of the day,

was becoming gloomy. A chandelier hung just above the table, but there was no switch for it that he could discover, and no one turned it on from the inner office. The boy did not come back to call the next in line. It was beginning to look as if the last applicant had been engaged and the boy had forgotten that there were others waiting.

He had just made up his mind to knock on the door to the inside offices and learn the cause of the delay, when a deep, dull roar, as of a hundred blasts set of at once, shook the building, and the floor of the waiting-room bulged up very much as if a giant, standing in the room below, had put his hand on the ceiling and pushed upward. Then there was a grinding crash close at hand as a naked steel beam tore its way through the inner wall.

The concussion hurled her toward the corridor door. He saw her clutch out for the knob and wrench the door half open, only to force it shut again as a choking, gaseous cloud of dust and fumes puffed in.

"Can't you get down the stairs?" he called. Then he saw the horror in her eyes, and realized that from the doorway she had looked into an abyss.

All the while he had been trying persistently to get up—the shock of the explosion had thrown him to the floor, and at first he had felt stunned. But this was passing off. His left foot seemed to be caught, and he thought the table might have fallen on it until he raised on his elbow far enough to see that an end of the heavy steel girder which had pierced the wall was pinning his leg tight to the floor under a mass of plaster and broken bricks. That there was no pain or even numbness in his foot made him reason that it was not crushed or probably hurt very much. The pressure seemed to be just above the ankle—it was like a clamp which permitted no movement.

The dust and gases from the explosion were pouring into the waiting-room through the broken-out glass of the transom over the corridor door and the jagged hole in the wall made by the girder. Strangely enough, there were no moans or shrieks from the injured and dying; and this seemed incomprehensible until he recalled that it was the week-end and the afternoon a half holiday, which would account for the early desertion of the offices. Probably, too, since there were no sounds from the rooms beyond, no one had been in them at the time of the catastrophe.

He had made no further attempts to free himself after realizing their futility; and she seemed only now to understand why he had not gotten up.

"It's your foot, isn't it?" she cried. "It's fast under that beam!"

"Yes," he answered quietly; but as she bent down, half strangled by the fumes, as if to pit her slender strength against the steel, he stopped her. "You can't move it," he said firmly. "Don't try. You'll only hurt yourself. See if you can't get into the office."

She shook her head, and he managed to twist around and learn the truth with his own eyes. The big girder which pinioned him lay across the corner of the room, one end—the higher one—sticking in the hole it had torn in the wall. Its position made it a mighty bar just above the sill of the door into the office beyond.

The shriek of fire-engine sirens and the clanging of bells came up suddenly, mingled with a confused, far-off hubbub as of men shouting.

"Isn't there a fire-escape you can reach from the windows?" he asked.

She went over to them and looked out. The glass had been shivered from the panes as cleanly as if removed by a glazier. It was this outlet for the fumes which constantly relieved the danger of asphyxiation.

"The only ladders are toward the back," she reported. "They're too far away."

"Can't you signal to any one?"

"I can't see down very far," came her answer. "It's all thick, black smoke."

Her mention of the smoke made him think of something else. He raised on his elbow and looked carefully about the room. Everything was covered with plaster and broken glass from the chandelier and the windows. There seemed to be nothing of any possible help until his eyes caught the outline of a gray canvas bag lying in the gloom of a corner and half buried in the débris. He remembered then that he had noticed it hanging from a nail near the windows while he had been waiting his turn, and he guessed at once what it contained. He had seen similar bags conspicuously displayed in other buildings, and he had learned their use.

He pointed it out, and asked her to bring it to him. Both his hands were free, and it took the work of only an instant to open the bag and pull out the odd-looking contrivance it held, which was a sort of harness

affair, made up of belts and straps and buckles and attached to a big coil of stout rope, tied in place with twine.

"It's a life-rope," he explained when he saw that she did not know. "This belt," he said, picking out the one he meant, "goes around the waist. I'll buckle the shoulder-straps for you."

She looked at him, still a little dazed and uncomprehending.

"You—you want me to put it on?" she asked.

"Yes," he said quickly. "I'm going to pass the rope around the pipe of the radiator there, and let you down into the alley."

Then his full purpose flashed over her.

"But I can't—I can't go down while you—"

"Why not?" he reasoned, with a reassuring touch of whimsicality. "The sooner you get down, you know, the sooner they'll be back to pry this little joist off my foot. Please slip it on quickly."

He helped her adjust the harness so that the strain on her body would be as well distributed as possible, and drew the shoulder-straps tight. All of it took no more than a minute, but a minute, in that inferno of thickening smoke and fumes, which seemed exiled from time itself. He could feel her quivering and trying hard to keep herself from it; but at last he had finished and tested everything swiftly. He uncoiled a little of the rope, and she passed it around the pipe, following his directions. Then, paying out enough more to let her get to the window and climb out, he braced himself as best he could with his right foot, ready to withstand the first strain of her weight when she started down.

"See if the fire is breaking out from any of the windows on the alley," he ordered.

"I can't tell!" she called back. "There's too much smoke."

"Listen!" he said. "If it breaks out while you're going down, jerk hard on the rope. If I get your signal, I'll try to pay out the rope faster and drop you through it quickly."

Then he called her to come back again. He was pulling something from the pocket of his coat as she groped down to him through the smoke. It was a handkerchief.

"Let me tie it over your mouth and nose," he insisted quietly. "It will help you to breathe."

He could see her only dimly, despite the fact that she had knelt down near enough for him to knot the handkerchief securely in place. Suddenly he heard her exclaiming that he needed it for himself.

"Not so long as I'm lying close to the floor," he explained quickly. "The best air is always lowest down where there's smoke. You won't forget to have them bring a stout lever back with them, will you?" he joked, trying to hearten her.

He heard her sob.

"I'll *make* them come!" she cried; and he felt her slender fingers close over his own. It was the first time he had known the caressing touch of a woman's hand, and for an instant he forgot the desperate need of haste.

Then, almost gruffly, he made her hurry to the window.

It was not until she was within two stories of the ground, dizzy and sick from the poison-charged smoke, even though the handkerchief had helped a very great deal, that she saw a fireman's helmet. Evidently he thought that she must be standing in a window, ready to jump, for he shouted to attract her attention and held out his arms to catch her. Then he saw the rope, and the next instant had cut her loose.

She couldn't get out coherent speech at first; but when he tried to take her to safety outside of the lines she fought so hard against it that he had to desist. At last, however, in disjointed, choking syllables she made him and the other firemen who had come into the alley understand about the man up there in the wrecked waiting-room on the fifth floor, lying there helpless with his leg caught under a steel beam, who had let her down.

At first they seemed to think it too dangerous to go up—their fire chief was on the point of ordering them clear of the burning building, for fear that the walls, which were hardly more than shells, might at any moment collapse. But she wouldn't give up; and finally one of them volunteered, and then another.

The rope, charred and blackened, was still hanging from the window, and they used it to guide them up.

By that time the smoke was so dense that she could not see them after they entered the alley. But she watched, her hands clenched, as if she could follow them as they mounted with their scaling ladders,

floor by floor, until they had groped into the room and found him. The flames were licking out from many of the windows, and a moment later the chief ordered every one out of the danger-zone. They had to carry her farther back by force.

But they could not keep her beyond the lines; and so, at last, they let her stay—a piteous little figure of a girl-woman leaning forward toward that pit of fire and striving to breathe and to wait. The threatened collapse of the walls did not come, and many minutes later she saw him and the firemen who had brought him down break out of the smoke.

He was walking unaided, and he pushed his way to her through a little group of newspaper reporters who appeared to have been waiting for him. He was limping slightly, and his hands looked raw from the cut of the rope; but he smiled as he saw her.

"Well, they got that little beam off quick enough!" he called out above the noise of the engines. "Are you all right?"

She was trying to find the words which had been on her lips to speak to him; but his matter-of-factness struck her suddenly shy and left her struggling quite miserably with a commonplace little question:

"But—your foot?"

"It's not hurt," he said. "Just squeezed a bit by that joist."

Then, before she could speak again, the reporters closed in on him.

"Oh, you want my name?" he cut them short. "Well, just put it down John Doe. That'll do, won't it?"

He turned back to her. "I don't believe they hired that last applicant," he said. "They're likely to get temporary quarters right away, you know, and advertise again, in that case. I hope you can get the place."

He smiled and, turning, dodged the newspaper men and disappeared into the crowds packed back of the fire-lines.

The reporters plied her with questions then, and she answered mechanically until they tried again to learn the name of the man who had saved her.

"I don't know," she said. "I didn't ask." So they wrote him into their stories as "Unknown," even while he was climbing the stairs to the mean little room it had been necessary for him to take through the long weeks he had been trying to supplant the position which had failed him.

After he had lighted the gas he went cheerfully about inspecting the damage to his best suit. It was smoke-grimed, and scorched a little here and there where the flames had puffed out at them as they were coming down.

He put on his shabby every-day garments, and laid the others carefully away, figuring on the possible cost of their renovation. Then, washing his blistered hands and the ugly bruise on his ankle, he bathed them in a little sweet oil, purchased with some of the money that should have gone toward his supper, and bound them up in old, soft rags; and, with the evening paper spread open on the bare deal-table, he began once more the search through the long, fine-printed columns of "Wants."

BEQUEATHAL.

Dawn and the drooping dusk,
  Twitter of birds,
Myrrh and the hint of musk,
Rosebuds within the husk—
    All these bequeath to me
  Far more than words
    Ever can breathe to me!

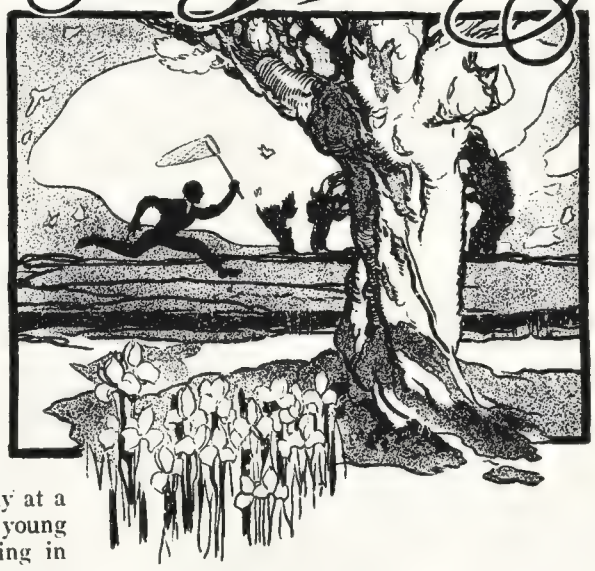
Sweetheart, those eyes of thine
  (Love's planets each!)
That tender guise of thine,
Smiles—mute replies of thine—
    All these bequeath to me
  Far more than speech
    Ever can breathe to me!

Clinton Scollard.

An Embarrassed Butterfly

By

Mercy Compton Marsh



MARCIA struggled into consciousness and looked round rather blankly. Then she realized that it was not the whir of the rising bell that had wakened her, but her father's hearty voice calling through the register. She heard her youngest brother stumbling sleepily down the stairs.

The old dog was barking frantically at a noisy wagon as it rattled by. The young dog was yelping joyously at everything in general and nothing in particular.

From the barn-yard came her older brother's voice, shouting to the "hired man" that the hogs were out again.

Marcia shivered at the homely sounds, and thought of the young instructor in biology. She remembered that she had gone to sleep the night before thinking of him. She knew that she would go on thinking of him the last thing at night and the first thing in the morning all the rest of her life.

She fancied his awakening in his own home, the home of culture and refinement "back East"; the home of thick rugs and soft hangings and well-trained servants—

"Marshy's got her diplomy at last, has she?" rasped the hired man as he strode cheerily away after the erring hogs.

Well-trained servants! What—oh, what—would he think of the hired man? Oh, she was glad—glad that he would never see it all. It had been hard to make him think she did not care when her heart was breaking for love of him. But she could not let him come to her home. Better he should go away grieved, thinking her frivolous and heartless, than to come and know the truth.

"Marcia, girl," called her father, "do you feel like you could come down and help mother a little? We are late this morning."

"Yes, father. Right away."

Marcia fought to make her voice cheerful. She sprang out of bed and began to dress quickly. Dear father! Her heart smote her in a sudden passion of love and loyalty. She stumbled over her unpacked trunk and took a fresh blue calico dress from her closet.

How many weeks ago her mother had ironed it with loving care and hung it there to wait her coming. They should never guess, she cried fiercely to herself, that she would have anything different, never, never.

She ran lightly down the back stairs to the kitchen, buttoning her dress as she went. The cheerful sputter of ham and gurgle of coffee greeted her as she opened the door at the foot of the stairs. Her mother looked up happily from the oatmeal she was stirring.

"Did you rest well, daughter? You don't know what a joy it is to have you home again."

Marcia went to set the table with a lighter heart. She gasped a little at the sight of the red table-cloth. She had forgotten there would be a red table-cloth. Then she thought remorsefully of the weary hands that ironed the table-cloths.

"I dare say I'd use newspapers or a pine

board if I had as much to do," she said to herself.

After all, it was home—home, where she was loved and wanted. She shook hands almost cordially with the hired man.

In the busy weeks that followed, Marcia slipped back into her old place. The strange aloof, out-of-place feeling gradually wore away.

She found herself actually interested in the daily egg harvest, and positively delighted over Brindle's new calf. The old house, brightened by little touches of her deft girl's fingers, began to assume for her once more a cheery, homelike air.

She began to realize that some of the old furniture was good. The living-room really had quite an air, with its big easy-chairs, and the large reading-table always heaped with books and magazines. And the dining-room was not bad, since the work of her strong young arms made snowy table linen possible.

Marcia surveyed it almost approvingly as she rested in the big Morris chair, one sunny July noon, while dinner waited for the tardy "men folks." She didn't know but she might almost have let him—

Her idly roving gaze fell upon the closed door across the hall, and she sat up with a jerk. She had forgotten the parlor—the unspeakable, unthinkable parlor!

She could see it plainly, even through the closed door. She could almost tell the number of red roses in every square yard of the velvet carpet.

"They seem to fairly jump up and hit you when you open the door," thought Marcia.

And the gaily garbed chairs; she counted them off on her fingers—two red ones, two green ones; the rocker, brown; the reception-chair, pink and brown; the sofa, bright blue.

Now, why couldn't they have all been in one color, or at least in harmony?

But the chairs and the carpet were not the worst. Marcia gave a little groan that was almost a sob as she thought of the worst. Perhaps something had happened to them. Perhaps even her mother's fond admiration had tired of them.

She walked quickly into the parlor. She closed the door and stood leaning against it, still holding the knob in her hand.

They were all there, and two new ones she had never seen; portraits, portraits, portraits; double rows of them—there was not wall space otherwise—precise, mathematical rows; their cords were all the same length; they were all the same distance apart from each other.

Portraits of aunts and uncles and cousins, of grandfathers and grandmothers, of herself and her brothers at all ages and stages; ghastly things in black and white crayon; atrocious things in colors; staring, glassy eyes, unnatural mouths!

Marcia covered her face with her hands, and thought of the beautiful old oil-paintings the instructor in biology had told her of, which hung in his ancestral home.

The clatter of voices and heavy boots on the back porch reminded her that dinner must be served.

"'The table must be laid, the meal must be served, though "portraits" stalk through the house.'"

Marcia varied the quotation, smiling rather grimly as she hurried back to the kitchen. Her older brother was talking rapidly to his mother in an eager undertone.

"And you know, mother, what it is to try to board at Carter's. He's an all-right fellow, too. I talked to him a long while down in the pasture. And the poor fellow's in the deuce of a mess trying to board over there. So I just brought him home to dinner.

"I thought maybe you could put him up while he's here; there's the spare room. And he wouldn't be a mite of trouble; he's gone all the time hunting specimens. He's a—"

"So you're a bug-man," the hired man's voice, muffled by soap-suds, floated through the open window. "Marshy, she's real interested in them kind of things since she's went to college."

Even before she heard the answering voice, in a blinding flash Marcia knew—knew with the certainty of an inexorable fate—that the bug-man was John Alexander Wentworth, M.S. She turned away dumbly.

She patted her hair before the little mirror over the kitchen wash-stand, and was vaguely glad she had put on a fresh dress after the morning's work.

All the time she was wondering what she should do when she had to greet him, for she was sure not a sound would come from her aching throat.

"And to think you're one of Marcia's teachers." Her mother's tired voice brightened in delighted welcome. "I should say I am glad Tom brought you home. To

think he never knew who he was bringing! You must just stay right here. We'll be more than glad to have you; won't we, daughter?"

Marcia flushed and smiled, and under the table pressed her mother's hand in a wave of tender affection. Dear mother, she was so proud to have him know her. Who wouldn't be proud of such a mother. If she only would not take him into the parlor—

"Pass the bread," said the hired man, as he dropped his steaming bulk into the chair beside the bug-man and drained his glass of water in one deafening gulp.

John Wentworth thanked his lucky stars for the good fortune that had befallen him and proceeded to make the most of his opportunities. But he was sorely puzzled by Marcia's moods.

Sometimes she met his ardent wooing with a wistful tenderness that was almost a confession of her love; sometimes she avoided him till he scarcely had a word with her for days.

To Marcia life had become one tense, all-absorbing effort to keep him away from the parlor.

She noted in terror her mother's growing liking for Wentworth. If she liked him, she would take him in there; that was the greatest favor she showed an honored guest.

Obviously, Marcia thought, the only safe thing was to keep her mother from liking him, and to this end she bent all her energy. She criticized him scathingly and unceasingly. She seized upon every little individual trait and held it up to ridicule.

Her mother was distressed.

"Why, Marcia," she argued reproachfully. "I never saw you take such a dislike to any one, and why you should to this young man is beyond me. I'm sure he is as likable a young fellow as I ever saw.

"And even if you can't like him, daughter," she added in gentle reproof, "remember he is our guest. And for my part, I think we are not showing him proper courtesy in not opening up the parlor."

The evenings were the times Marcia most dreaded. Her father and the boys were disappointed that she refused them the music they had so long looked forward to when Marcia should come home; but the piano was in the forbidden room.

Wentworth added his insistence to the nightly plea, and Marcia fell to devising schemes to keep them entertained out of doors. She made a porch light out of a big lantern, and dragged out table and chairs, an inviting place for cards and checkers. She arranged enticing nooks on the lawn with hammocks and easy chairs. She began to breathe almost freely when two weeks had passed safely.

She noted with proud pleasure the genuine liking that grew steadily between Wentworth and her father and brothers. If mother only would not like him too well.

Marcia sang softly and happily to herself one hot Sunday afternoon as she brushed her hair carefully and put on a fresh white gown. She had surrendered to her heart. Good-by to foolish fears, and more foolish pride. She would seize her happiness.

The next time he tried to tell her—and he would tell her any time she would let him — she dimpled radiantly at the half-finished thought.

She tripped lightly down the stairs, still humming softly to herself a snatch of college song. The house was wrapped in its Sabbath stillness. Her father dozed in his chair on the shady porch.

Down in the hammock Tom was absorbed in a book. Her younger brother wandered disconsolately about snapping chips at wildly clucking chickens. Marcia wandered into the hall, following a faint hum of voices. Through the open parlor door floated her mother's voice, complacent, happy.

"And this is Marcia when she was ten—the one in the big gilt frame. It's taken from the one I showed you in the large album, you know."

Marcia turned and sped noiselessly through the house, across the yard, through the pasture gate, on down to her shaded nook beside the creek; there to throw herself on the rocky bank and sob till she lay quiet from sheer exhaustion. For she was still very young, and very foolish.

A long time after—hours, she thought, or maybe years — she sat up abruptly at the sound of a quick footstep.

"Marcia!" cried the bug-man. "Crying?"

He did not stop to press his suit, nor to beg her sweet permission. He simply sat down on the big rock beside her and drew her to his arms, and quite boldly and brazenly kissed her quivering lips.

"Now," he commanded, "tell me all about it—everything. What has been the matter with you all this time?"

And Marcia, without so much as ques-

tioning, without stopping to reason why, told him.

"And even the frames are the worst frames that ever were!" she wailed. "And, oh, what must you think; you who—why, you're laughing—"

"Oh, Marcia, Marcia, you funny child!" he gasped, and leaning back against the rock he laughed till he struggled for breath.

Marcia's lip quivered, and he sat up, instantly serious and tender.

"My dear little girl," he said gently, "how many kinds of a prig do you think me? What possible difference do you think it could make to me whether you had a parlor at all, or lived in a one-room sod house? And as to the pictures, dear, no matter if they are not what you would choose, don't think of that.

"Think of the love they represent. Think of the tender heart that cherishes every poor likeness for love of the one it stands for. So you see the spirit of the parlor becomes a beautiful thing, the spirit of love and home.

"And now we are going home," he ended gaily, drawing her to her feet. "And we are going in and sit on that blue sofa, and I am going to adore every picture that has you in it.

"And then we'll wake up that silent piano to celebrate our happiness in the unspeakable parlor."

THE SEVEN TORTOISE-SHELL CATS

By F. L. Nelson

BY a curious chain of circumstances, Gordon Hyde and I found ourselves in a little deserted cabin that seemed to cling upon the precipitous slope of one of the mountain ranges of eastern Tennessee. It was night, and a storm was raging without as only mountain storms can rage. The wind howled, the thunder rolled and crashed, and by the intermittent lightning flashes we could see the pines lashing and swaying before a hurricane that seemed to be struggling to uproot the very mountain itself and cast it bodily into the gorge below.

We had brought blankets and a portable stove for our cooking necessities; a roaring fire of resinous pine logs blazed in the mud-plastered fireplace of mountain boulders that took up all of one end of the cabin; so we were fairly comfortable. I had brought along a copy of my favorite Macaulay, and I was trying to read by the firelight, although the crash of thunder, reverberating in my ears like the roar of a

thirteen-inch battery, and occasionally filling the atmosphere with the fumes of sulfur, tended to distract my attention from the printed page.

Hyde sat in absorbed thought upon an upturned nail-keg, his immaculate suit of tan, his silk vest and his tan spats in almost ludicrous contrast to our sordid surroundings. His chin was in his hands, and his tensely drawn, aquiline features showed that his perfectly controlled mind was concentrated upon the tragic problem that had lured us so far from our familiar haunts in New York.

"I hope nothing happens to take us out to-night," I remarked, laying down my book. "Just listen to that wind!"

Before he could reply, a bolt struck so close that the sharp report made me jump, and even affected Hyde's iron nerves, for he looked up in a startled manner, while little blue balls of fire seemed to be playing about on the puncheon floor.

The reverberations finally died away, and then followed the stillness of death; suddenly broken by a woman's scream.

Hyde and I rushed to the door and, throwing it open, looked out. Black, impenetrable darkness met our eyes. The lightning had ceased, and the rain fell in torrents. The center of the storm had passed over the mountain. We waited for some clue to guide us. Then a distant lightning flash lighted the landscape, and Hyde's sharp eyes discerned something in the path leading up to our cabin door. We ran out into the night, and, lying in the path, we found the form of a woman. We lifted her gently.

"Oh, father! Father!" she murmured, and then sank into unconsciousness.

Together, we silently bore her into the cabin.

"She's not been struck. She's only fainted from fright," was Hyde's decision after a hasty examination. He then set about reviving her, and as my clumsy fingers were useless in this work, I left it to his more experienced hands.

As I sat watching the strange scene, my mind went back over the events leading up to it. Hyde and I, some months before, had retired from the Munro Detective Agency, with which I had been connected for some dozen or more years, and had joined forces on our own account as investigators of all criminal and business mysteries. The agency tried desperately hard to retain Hyde, but his active mind could not brook the dull routine of cases in the day's grist. Only those in which the mysterious or the bizarre were predominate interested him or drew out the fulness of his powers.

Work came to our hands; but we were not then so widely known that it did not give us a little thrill one day to receive a hurried call from one of the biggest insurance companies in the land.

We went to the offices of the company at once, and were shown into the private office of the superintendent of agencies, a brusk, businesslike little man, who knew his own mind, and who was eager to share this knowledge with others.

"You gentlemen have been highly recommended to me," he said briskly. "I want you to start to Tennessee to-night, and to find out for me why six perfectly good risks that we have had on our books less than three months have died off within two weeks."

"Have you no secret service of your own?" inquired Hyde wearily; and I knew that he saw only a prosaic case of insurance fraud.

"Naturally, I have exhausted my own resources before applying to you," answered Mr. Stephen Burt, the superintendent.

"Then give me an outline of the case, and I will tell you whether, in my opinion, we can help you," said Hyde.

"Certainly. To begin with, we write a special form of one thousand dollar policy for men beyond the ordinary age limit of fifty-five and up to seventy. It is expensive insurance, and very few such policies are written. Several months ago we were surprised to receive twelve applications from a county in eastern Tennessee in which we never before have written a dollar's worth of business. All but three of them were for the special form of policy I have described. I had some doubts about passing these risks, as I am informed that the people in that part of the country are almost savages; but we are always anxious to break into new territory. And now they are dying off like flies at the rate of a thousand dollars a head. Of course, we have paid the losses without question, and we have made a quiet investigation without results. But a sort of sixth sense, upon which I have learned to depend, tells me that there is fraud. The company will spend many times the amount of the losses rather than be victimized. Therefore, I wish you to start for Tennes-

see at once, and to make a quiet, confidential investigation—first, to ascertain if fraud exists, and second, if it does, to bring the guilty parties to justice. If for no other reason than curiosity, the company wishes to learn why six perfectly good risks in the same county die within a few weeks of each other, of fright."

Hyde, who had begun to be intensely bored, looked up with interest.

"Fright, you say? Fright at what?"

"The reports of the local physician merely state, in the proper blank, 'Heart failure caused by fright'; but you may depend upon it we were not satisfied with this. One of our own investigators informs us that each risk was supposed to have been frightened to death at the sight of a tortoise-shell cat. In each instance, he says, the risk has been found dead in bed, the face horribly distorted with fear, and that when the door has been opened a large cat of the tortoise-shell variety has rushed out and escaped. There is quite a reign of terror in the community, I understand, and these events are looked upon as some sort of a visitation. This superstition is intensified by the fact that the people declare there are no cats of this variety in the county. As it is a wild mountain community, having little intercourse with the outside world and no newspapers, the affair has not become known, and we have been interested in keeping it quiet. Do you now think you can aid us?"

"Mr. Burt, we will start to-night," replied Hyde decisively.

"Good! Jason is the county-seat and post-office. It's off the railroad, I understand; but you can get a livery rig at Paint Rock. There's some sort of a hotel at Jason, and you'll find our Mr. Robertson there. He will give you every assistance in his power."

"We shall be glad of his advice," said Hyde, as we prepared to withdraw, "but we probably will work independently of him."

At the end of a twenty-mile drive from the railroad we found the town of Jason, a little hamlet of about three hundred nestling at the foot of Knob Mountain. The hotel was a sorry affair; merely a one-story log structure of five rooms in line facing upon a rude porch. In one end room the lank mountaineer landlord and his sharp-featured wife slept. The next room was the dining-room, the cooking being done in a lean-to kitchen at the rear, and the other three rooms were at the disposal of transients. Robertson, the insurance detective, we found, occupied one of these, and two timber-buyers had usurped the other two.

Robertson we found to be an elderly man who had arrived at the garrulous stage of life a little before his time. In his broad feet, his slouching walk, and his bristling gray mustache, that gave his upper lip the appearance of a *chevaux-de-frise,* I read his history from patrolman to plain-clothes man—from fly-cop to private detective—as plainly as if it had been printed on his shirt-front.

We were just in time for the midday meal, and after tasting the landlord's fare I for one was not sorry there were no accommodations for us, even though our habitation for the night still was an open question. After the meal we retired to Robertson's room to learn what, if anything, he knew of the case, although his antagonism was too evident to expect much assistance from him.

"The company can spend its money as it likes," he began sententiously. "It can pay me a salary to live at this bum hash-foundry, acquirin' nothin' but a bad case of indigestion, and, by the same token, it can send fancy detectives here by the dozen, an' I won't say a word. But it can't prove nothin' crooked in any one of these deaths. Just take a look at this list. Here, I'll read it," and he read the following list, with which Hyde and I already were but too familiar:

Tobe Watkins, aged 63, beneficiary, wife.
Captain Andrew Jackson Claypole, aged 65, beneficiary, wife.
Judge William Trimble, aged 68, beneficiary, sister.
Joe Bundy, aged 23, beneficiary, mother.
Polk Liggett, aged 65, beneficiary, wife.
Grundy H. Lane, aged 67, beneficiary, sister.

"There, I've investigated every one of them cases," he added, "and there ain't a single clue to hitch one of them to the other. They're none of them related, or I might think it was one of their here feuds. It's just coincidence, that's all. The company could lose that many risks in Hoboken and not bat an eyelid. Just because it's up here in the mountains, they think folks oughtn't never to die, I reckon. But that's nothin' to me so long as I get my bit every week."

"But how do you account for the cats?" I inquired, for Hyde seemed disposed to

ignore the earnest but garrulous Robertson completely.

"Cats, bugdust! Do you know what killed these men? It was no more nor less than epidemic hallucination. That's what it was. First one, Ogden, goes out to a big family dinner, overeats, gets indigestion, has a nightmare and dreams a tiger-cat is after him, wakes up all tied into a knot, and yells, 'The cat! The cat!' Heart stops. Of course, the wife then sees the cat, too! Suggestion, you see? That starts all the rest of them. Why, one time during the war—" But Hyde and I had the serious fact before us that we had no place to sleep for the night, and we did not wait to hear what happened during the war.

We interviewed the landlord on the big question of a place to sleep.

"Ther' ain't nobuddy here puts up furriners but me," he said. "Judge Trimble would have tooken ye in ef he was livin', but ther' ain't nary tother house in these here parts whar they got more'n nuff room'n fer jest the fambly. Tell ye what I cain do. Ef ye don't mind campin' out, I've got a little log house 'bout half-way up the mounting whar I used afore I come in town to keep this here ho-tel, thet ye cain hev an' welcome. I'll hitch up my mule an' tote yer things up thar, an' the ole woman'll lend ye the loan of a passel of kivers, an' I cain let ye hev what vittles ye want. Kinder lonesome up thar, I reckon, but better'n layin' out. Ain't nobuddy lives on that side o' the mounting ceppen Colonel Jim Shackelford, an' he ain't prime company. Never comes to town no more, Colonel Jim don't. Jest sends down that thar pretty gal of hissen, Sara Jane, an' she totes up what grub her an' her pa needs."

We accepted the offer of the cabin for want of a better; and the landlord went out to hitch up his mule

"The cabin," said Hyde, "will at least offer an escape from the plague of loquacity which seems to have struck Jason."

Just as we were leaving the hotel for our five-mile drive in the landlord's rickety buckboard, one of the timber-buyers came forward with an offer of a portable stove.

"I know what it is to cook by an open fire," he said, "and this is an invention of my own that I always carry with me. You're welcome to the use of it while you are here"

Five days we had lived in the cabin when the storm broke over the mountain, and we were called to the door by the scream of a woman in the night. Had we made progress? I could not see it, although I did not know all that lay in the back of Hyde's brain. Twice we had made the trip together to the village, but we could learn nothing. The mountaineers were apathetic.

"It is a judgment," they said, and they waited calmly for the mysterious death to strike another household. We learned nothing from the doctor, who was a fine exemplification of Pope's warning against a little learning. He was a lank, elderly man, with a straggling wisp of beard under his chin, and he combined the duties of village druggist with a traffic in prescriptions of calomel, ipecac, quinin, and the few fluid extracts of herbs to which his knowledge was limited. His medical education consisted of a year's course in Louisville in the years when the bars to the profession were far from being pig-tight.

Dr. Bullwinkle admitted that he had made no autopsies, and tacitly confessed that he himself did not know the cause of either of the deaths.

"They just up an' died," he said, "and I writ 'fright' in the papers fer want of a better word. But I don't take no stock in this here cat story. Who seen 'em? Nobuddy but the wimmen folks. Wimmen folks is liable to get highstrikes and see 'most anything. You see, the wimmen folks 'round here in these mountings gits up airly and does ther chores. Take Tobe Watkins's woman, fer instance. She gits up to do the milkin' and git the breakfast, and she comes into the bedroom to wake old man Watkins fer breakfast, an' finds him layin' there dead as a door-nail. Natch'ally, she gits the highstrikes, an' 'lows as how she sees a tortoise-shell cat runnin' underneath her skirts and outen the room. Then, when Cap' Claypole ups an' dies, his ole woman 'lows as how she seen it, too; an' so on down th' line. That's all the stock I take in the cat story. Ef you was to ask me plain what I actually think killed 'em, I'd say it was cholrie. I ain't never saw a case, but I hearn my pappy tell about th' big cholrie times in 1857. But 'twouldn't do to hint that about these parts an' git everybody stirred up."

We were working over the same ground, and producing as little in the way of results as had Robertson before us.

Hyde walked out of the drug-store and across the street to the court-house, a low

frame building, in front of which, at a public hitching-rack, a half-dozen horses and mules stood switching lazily at the flies. I waited a few moments to try to get some definite information out of the doctor-druggist, and failing, I followed Hyde to the court-house. There I found him pulling down record books and studying them.

"I am making a study of backwoods chirography," he said with an absent look. "See here, isn't this a remarkable piece of penmanship, dated in 1867, probably written with a quill pen."

I glanced at the caption, which read:

The State of Tennessee vs. Harrison Turner	Murder. A True Bill.

"I will be engaged here for some time," continued Hyde; "and perhaps you had better replenish our stock of provisions and meet me here in time to go home before dark. There seems to be nothing better to do, so I might as well be improving my mind from these musty records."

Hyde and I had fallen into the habit of working independently when on a case, leaving each other uninformed, unless requiring help. "Theories are useless until they are verified by demonstration," said Hyde; "and if we work independently, we are two heads. If we depend upon each other, we are not more than one and a half at best." Consequently, I was not surprised when, toward evening, I called for Hyde, that he made no mention of the results of his afternoon's work, although I was sure it must have some bearing on the case in hand.

"We are going to have a storm," was his only remark, as he took one of my bundles from me and we set out on the five-mile hike up the mountain. Hyde's prophecy was correct, and the storm broke, as I have described, soon after we had eaten our frugal supper.

Such was my slight and fragmentary knowledge concerning "the horrors of Knob Mountain" when we found our cabin suddenly turned into a hospital for a beautiful, fainting girl. That she was beautiful did not require a second glance. Her dark hair had come down and fell in rippling waves over the pillow; her features were regular and fine; her skin was brown underneath the pallor of insensibility; her form was rounded and graceful, but betokened the strength and activity born of a free, untrammeled life. That the eyes concealed beneath the drooping lids were worthy of all these excellences, I had no doubt. She appeared to be about eighteen; but girls of the Tennessee mountains develop early, and she may have been younger.

"She has come out of her faint, and passed into a natural sleep without regaining consciousness. It is better so. Poor girl, she has had a terrible shock," said Hyde, as he left off chafing her wrists and bathing her forehead with something from his ever-ready medicine-chest. "There is nothing for us to do until she awakens. My God! I ought to have warned him, but I didn't think it would strike so soon, and in the midst of this terrible storm."

"Warned whom? What has struck? What do you mean?" I asked in a breath.

"The tortoise-shell cat. It has struck again, and Colonel Jim Shackelford is the victim. This is his daughter."

I had already surmised this, as the landlord at the hotel had told us that Shackelford and his daughter were our only neighbors on the mountainside.

"I suspected it," continued Hyde, who was strangely agitated, and kept clenching his hands nervously while he sought to keep his voice down to avoid waking the sleeping girl. "I learned enough at the court-house this afternoon to put me on the right track. It was in my mind to keep on up the mountain and warn him, but the storm was right on us. This is the seventh. I wonder if he will get the other five?"

"But what on earth are you driving at? Remember, I know nothing of your afternoon's work," I questioned, driven desperate by Hyde's words.

"Oh, yes, Foster; it is time I told you what I have learned. If we had only kept on to Shackelford's to-night, we should have known it all. Now, there is nothing to do but to wait. Well, to review the case, some two months ago twelve men in this county in which an insurance policy never before had been written, applied to have their lives insured. What does this suggest to you? That these twelve men had reason to fear something. Within three months after the policies are written, six of the twelve are dead. Each one is found dead in bed, alone. Three of the six are married men, and in these three cases death seems to have

occurred between the time when the wife got up to do her morning work and the time she went to call her husband to breakfast. The houses in which these deaths occurred are widely separated, two being in the town and the other four at various points through the mountains.

"Reserving for the present the story of the tortoise-shell cats, the number twelve suggested to my mind a jury. Robertson had been unable to draw a logical connection between any of these victims. I was satisfied that Robertson had not gone back far enough. Here is what I learned from the court records. In 1867, Harrison Turner was convicted of murder and executed. There were no court stenographers in those days, and even the indictment is not on file; so there is nothing to show any of the facts relating to this murder, not even the name of the murdered man; and I did not think it wise to inquire about the court-house, for if we are on the right track, we must not flush the game.

"But just look over the names of the jury in the case and see what you think. Here they are: Colonel Jim Shackelford was foreman, and the other members were Tobias Watkins, Andrew Jackson Claypole, William Trimble, Joseph Bundy, Polk Liggett, Grundy Lane, John H. Manlove, Alexander MacBean, Isaac Ferguson, Thomas Culbertson, and Ball Whiting. The tortoise-shell cat has got six of them. It added a seventh to-night—Colonel Jim Shackelford. You see why I say I wonder if it will get the other five."

"But," I objected, studying the list of the six deaths which I held in my hand, "there is a flaw here. Joe Bundy's age is given as twenty-three. How could he have sat on a jury in 1867?"

"I looked up the birth records. This is a son of the juryman. It must be a terrible revenge, if revenge it is, that pursues to the second generation. But Miss Shackelford is waking up. Not a word till we get her story."

The girl waked up, and looked wildly around the room. For a moment she did not seem to be able to collect her faculties, and then she remembered and fell into a passionate flood of weeping.

"Oh, father, father!" she moaned, as she swayed back and forth on the bed holding her hands before her eyes as if to shut out a horrible memory. I knew by her use of the word "father," instead of the colloquial "pappy," that she must have had an education superior to the mountains.

Hyde gave her a draft he had prepared from his medicine-case. It seemed to calm her instantly.

"We will help you, Miss Shackelford; perhaps we can save him," he said.

"No, no! It's too late! He's dead! I know he's dead! It was horrible—horrible!"

"Tell us about it, if you have the strength. Remember, justice is still to be considered. Captain Foster and I have our duty to the law. You must help us. Your father may at least be avenged."

Hyde had struck the chord that is latent in the breast of every mountaineer, no matter what the sex or education. Her eyes lighted up, and they were beautiful eyes, the eyes of a tigress bereft of her young.

"I was wakened in the night," she began steadily. "It was a scream like the scream of a cat. I thought it was the storm, the wind howling through the pines, and then I heard it again. It was in the house. I was afraid, and I lay still and waited. Father and I lived all alone, and have since my mammy died when I was a baby, except the four years that he sent me to Knoxville to school. There was no one to call. Then I thought I heard a footfall outside the house, and I thought it was father up, for if it had been anybody else Coon, our hound, would have barked. I lay still a while and heard nothing, and all at once I heard an awful scream from father's room.

"I got up and slipped on this dress. I was afraid to open his door. I thought of all the dreadful things that have been happening on the mountain. I went to the outside door of the cabin and called Coon. He did not come. Then I went to father's window. The rain was pouring, but the lightning made it as light as day. I looked in. Oh—"

Again she pressed her hands against her eyes, while her body trembled like a leaf in the wind.

After a little while she became calm again.

"I looked in," she continued, "and there lay father on his bed. I knew he was dead, for there was the most horrible look of agony on his face. And sitting on his breast was an immense, big tortoise-shell cat. I could see its eyes like balls of fire when the lightning flashed.

"I turned and ran as fast as I could, and

as I ran down the path I stumbled over something. I stooped and felt it. It was the body of Coon. It was dead, but still warm. How I got here I don't know. The last I remember is a terrible flash of lightning. Then I awoke here. Oh, my poor father, my poor father!"

"The door to your father's room—was it still locked when you left?" asked Hyde.

"Yes; I did not open it."

"And the window?"

"The window was nailed at the bottom, but open at the top. And when I looked through, I pushed up the upper sash. I was afraid the cat would jump out on me, and then it flashed across my mind that the cat must have something to do with his death, and that it must be imprisoned there."

"Oh, you clever girl!" exclaimed Hyde. "Look, Foster! It's getting light outside. The rain has stopped. We must get quick action. Take both your guns, and hurry on ahead to the Shackelford cabin. I will follow as fast as Miss Shackelford can travel, for we must not leave her here alone. It is important that the cabin be watched. Do not go near, but take your stand where you can see Shackelford's window. Which side of the house is his room on, Miss Shackelford?"

"The east."

"Then watch that window, and if you see any one approaching it, shoot. Don't give him time to get within twenty feet of you. Just shoot. And as you value your life, don't go near the window."

Obeying Hyde's instructions without knowing their import, I ran up the slippery, winding mountain-path until I came to a clearing almost at the summit of the mountain. The Shackelford cabin was of that ambitious style of backwoods architecture known as "two decks and a passage"—that is, two full-sized one-room cabins connected by a covered passageway that served as a dining-room in the summer. Shackelford, I had learned, slept in the east of these cabins, and I judged his daughter occupied the west one. What a lonely, sordid existence, I thought, for a beautiful and educated girl. It was broad day when I reached the clearing.

The only evidence of the tragedy of the night before was the body of a hound lying in the path that led from the edge of the clearing to the passageway. I took up my stand behind a tree at the edge of the clearing, and waited. Once I thought I heard a stealthy step behind me and the crackling of the underbrush; but, although I strained my eyes to pierce the thicket, I saw nothing.

After about an hour, Hyde came toiling up the path with Miss Shackelford on his arm. In one hand he carried a peculiar object, the nature of which I could not make out until he came up, when I observed that it was a bee helmet. He made no comment, but, motioning to me to follow, he led the girl directly to the house.

With great delicacy he urged the girl to go to her own room, close the door, and lie down, while we went about our task.

"But I am brave, Mr. Hyde," she objected. "I am not afraid."

"I do not want to involve you in a risk of which I do not even know the full nature," answered Hyde; "but I know you will be perfectly safe in your room. First, have you a covered market-basket?"

The girl hurried to get the article, which was hanging from one of the beams of the passageway. Then, upon Hyde's insistence, she went into her room and closed the door.

Hyde's first care was to make an examination of Shackelford's window.

"I did not want you to approach it," he said, "if it were not entirely closed. Also, I wished to leave the tracks, if there are any, absolutely undisturbed."

From a distance we saw that the window was, as the girl had said, tightly closed. The soft ground was ideal for retaining tracks, and, moreover, right in front of the window was a flower-bed of geraniums and verbenas, with sufficient open space between the plants to make our quest a simple one. In the midst of one of these open spaces we found the two little tracks of the girl's slippered feet, showing where she had stood to peep into the window by the light of the lightning flashes.

Completely surrounding these tracks were two of the strangest tracks that ever marred an old-fashioned Southern garden. They were huge, shapeless, uncouth, startling. Fully fifteen inches in length and as many broad, the outer rim marked by the prints of claws that had dug deep into the soft earth. The flowers that came within the circumference of this remarkable spoor were pressed into a shapeless mass. The tracks were there when the girl looked into the window, for the print of both her slippers were clearly defined within one of the circles.

Hyde studied these strange marks with a startled air. He got down on his knees and examined them closely. Then he stepped back and examined the blue grass turf. Here it was more difficult to distinguish traces, for the rain of the night was the first for several weeks, and the dry earth had soaked it up rapidly. But his trained eye discerned enough to tell him something of the history of the night.

"Here, Foster," he said, pointing to the marks on the turf, "is where the creature came up. Here is where it stepped back. Notice that the back of the track, the heel, if I may call it such, is deeper than the claws. Foster, what do you say made these tracks?"

I had been puzzling my brain to answer this question. An elephant? A camel? A bear? I dismissed all these suggestions offhand. I had seen the track of all three, and they were unlike these. At last it flashed across my mind. The dinosaur in the American Museum of Natural History; in the flesh, he would make just such a track as this.

"It looks to me like a dinosaur's track," I said hesitatingly.

"And pray, Foster," said Hyde, with a smile, "what is a dinosaur doing roaming the mountains of eastern Tennessee. Your theory is untenable."

"Then, what is it?"

"Well, to tell the truth, you are not so very far off. The tracks of this animal have puzzled some of the shrewdest scientists, and caused them to wonder if specimens of the dinosaur may not have survived. It is the track of the cayman, or giant crocodile of the river Guayas, in Ecuador."

"And what is the giant crocodile of the Guayas doing in Tennessee?" I retorted.

For answer, Hyde did a most incomprehensible thing. He stepped into the flower-bed, at one side of the tracks, and went through the motions of lowering a window, and then of throwing something. Then he stepped back and carefully examined, first, his own tracks and then those of the crocodile.

"I will venture to say, Foster," he said, when this examination was completed, "that this crocodile did not weigh more than one hundred and sixty pounds. But we have to deal with a cat now, and the crocodile can wait."

All this time we had been so absorbed in the strange tracks that the ghastly scene inside the room and the terrible animal we were to face had been forgotten for the moment. We both looked through the window, and saw the thin, spare form of an elderly man lying on the bed. His limbs were drawn, and the face was distorted, as if a horrible vision suddenly had congealed there. At first glance he could see nothing of the cat, but closer scrutiny disclosed it sitting on a walnut chest of drawers, its eyes blazing fiendishly.

Hyde stepped back from the window and proceeded to draw on a pair of heavy gloves. Then he picked up the bee helmet and put it over his head. Rigged out in this peculiar costume, he turned to me and siad:

"Stand here and watch the thing, Foster. When you see the door open a little way, if it has not moved, whistle. I don't want it to escape while I am going in."

I saw the door open, gave Hyde the signal, and he dashed in and quickly shut the door. I noted that he had in one hand the covered basket. Then ensued a strange battle between the man and the cat. The creature seemed determined not to be captured, and it gave Hyde a desperate fight, dashing at him with teeth and claws, and screaming like a whole back-fence cantata. But at last he succeeded in grasping it by the skin of the neck, and, holding it at arm's length, he thrust it, writhing and squirming, into the basket. When it was safely fastened in he took off the bee helmet and his gloves, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"There," said Hyde, as he came out with the basket—"we now have the key to the lair of the giant crocodile."

He then motioned me to enter. I did so, and together we made a careful examination of the body of Shackelford. To my eyes, there was not a sign to show the probable cause of death. One thing only struck me as queer, and that was that the rigidity of the muscles seemed abnormal. Every muscle was drawn as tight as a bowstring, and as hard as iron. I looked at Hyde questioningly, and he pointed out to me a thin red line on one of the hands. It was so slight that it might have been overlooked by the most careful medical examiner.

"There is where death entered," said Hyde, "and a terrible death it was. Do you know, Foster, I have in preparation a book on the thousands of methods by which the thread of life may be snapped. I have

heard of some strange ones. There is the death-dealing boot of the Yaquis; the seed of the Indian crab-apple held under the finger-nail by the Hindus; the needle stiletto of the Apaches of Paris; the ring of the Borgias, and the glass poignard of the Camorra of Sicily; but I shall have to list as the strangest of all the one clawed cat of East Tennessee. But come, Foster, we have a big job before us. Death may strike again to-night, and there is no time for explanations. I saw a horse in the stable, and I suppose there is some sort of a buckboard. I want you to hitch up and take the girl to town. She can't stay here. Then pick up Robertson and meet me at the cabin. He will be all we want in on it, and he is a nervy man. And, Foster, this is the most important of all. Bring with you a hound; a good one. Now, hurry. It must be noon already, and there's no time to lose. I'll jog along to the cabin with this little pet. I've a little work to do there while you are in town."

"But what about Shackelford?" I objected. "It doesn't seem right to leave him here this way."

"We can't do him any good. You can tell the landlord to notify the coroner."

Miss Shackelford demurred about going to the village with me, and insisted that she would remain with the body of her father, but Hyde would not consent. "I would not answer for your life until nightfall," he told her.

I fulfilled Hyde's directions, left the girl at the hotel, dragged Robertson away from the perusal of a week-old newspaper, and left with him before the landlord had a chance to spread the news of the night's tragedy. The hound was an easy commission. Every family in the mountains owned five or six, and we secured one for the modest sum of fifty cents, promising to turn him loose when we were through with him.

When we reached the cabin, Hyde, we found, had rigged up a small chemical laboratory out of his medicine-chest, and was busy with test-tubes. The basket stood at one side, and on the other was a paper cracker-box full of holes.

"Here, Robertson," he said, "I want to show you how epidemic hallucination works."

He dipped a surgeon's needle into one of the test-tubes, and, opening the cracker-box, he took out a field mouse. Holding the little animal between his left finger and thumb, he carefully scratched its nose with the needle. Instantly it stiffened in death.

"And now perhaps you will also believe in the tortoise-shell cat," and Hyde opened the basket and took out the twisting, clawing animal. "She's harmless now, but you will notice that she has only one claw on the right paw and none on the left. All the others have been carefully cut off. Does this still look like a suggestion to you?"

"Hum! Just about the liveliest suggestion I've seen in a coon's age," said Robertson, scratching his head in amazement. "Poison, of course; but what do you make it out to be?"

"Curare."

"Come again, now that you've found the way?" queried Robertson bromidically.

"Yes," continued Hyde reflectively. "It must be curare, although I cannot be certain without further tests. It is the most terrible poison known to man, and is used by the Indians of Brazil, Ecuador, and Bolivia to poison their arrow-tips. An animal merely scratched with it falls dead on the instant, and, strange to say, its edible qualities are unimpaired. It acts by instant paralysis of the nerve centers. It never has been satisfactorily analyzed, although Boehm, a German chemist, has isolated an alkaloid which he named curarin. No white man knows how curare is made, but it is supposed to be concocted from the serum of decayed livers mixed with the venom of the fer-de-lance and the echus, the two most deadly reptiles of South America."

"But where does the cat come in?" asked Robertson.

"Whoever is at the bottom of this devilish work has made the cat, or cats — for probably there are several of them—the instruments for administering the poison. As you see, this cat has been deprived of all but one claw. That was to avoid a typical cat's scratch, and to make the slight abrasion of the skin practically unnoticeable. Then the poison has been made into a paste and spread upon the hollow inside of the claw. The cat, rendered violent either by continued bad treatment or by the nature of its diet, was then thrust through the window of the victim. As soon as the door was opened it dashed out. We succeeded in capturing this one because Miss Shackelford did not open the door to her father's room, but looked in through the window. I scraped enough of the poison out of the

claw of this cat to make the solution contained in these two test tubes, and I venture to say there is concentrated death enough there to kill the whole village of Jason. I shall attempt to make a perfect analysis of it in my New York laboratory."

While Hyde was running on with his lecture, his eyes shining with the pride in his own cleverness that I have always held to be his sole weakness of character, I was thinking that we were losing time, and that we had a deal better be after the author of the crime than bothering with the chemistry of it. So I interrupted:

"I am more interested, Hyde, in running down your giant crocodile of the Guayas. If you know so much, perhaps you can tell us where to find him."

"No, I cannot; but we may safely leave that to the cat. Did you bring the hound?"

"He's tied in the wagon."

"Then all we have to do is to turn this animal loose and put the hound on his trail. That should lead us to the lair of the crocodile."

"Well, I want to take a squint at his feet when we find him," said Robertson, to whom I had told the story of the strange tracks on our trip from the village.

It was a desperate undertaking that we planned. Surely a demon of such devilish craft and resourcefulness would not allow himself to be taken without exhausting his ingenuity for evil. But I do not think either of us gave the danger more than a passing thought in the intense interest of the chase.

We took the basket to the door and opened it. The cat dashed out, and was off through the timber like a yellow streak. Holding back the dog, which Hyde had taken the precaution to muzzle, so that his baying would not prove a warning, we waited until the animal had such a start that we were satisfied it would not be captured before reaching the lair of its terrible master. And then the chase began.

It led us through tangled underbrush, around the flank of the mountain, the hound tugging in leash. Mile after mile we trudged with set teeth, keeping silent that we might husband breath. On the other side of the mountain the trail led down into the valley, and then up the course of a mountain stream that dashed along through a cañon of the Yellowstone in miniature. Up this little cañon the hound led us until the sun began to sink low in the west, and I for one began to fear that the quarry might not be run down before nightfall.

But at last we found ourselves in a wild, forbidding "cave country" similar to that peculiar formation in southern Ohio. We had passed the mouths of several of these caverns when the dog turned and, struggling at his leash, tried to dash into one of them. Then another scent must have caught his sensitive nostrils, for he slunk back and crouched toward us with his tail between his legs.

"He's there!" whispered Hyde.

He was there, perhaps; but how to get him out was another question. I for one did not relish a dash into that forbidding hole, and I saw Robertson shake his head in a puzzled way.

"I'm going in, fellows," declared Hyde. We tried to dissuade him, to rouse in him fear of an unknown death in a terrible form, that might come through the prick of a dart from a blow gun, the scratch of an angry cat, or by any number of means; but he was determined. With sinking hearts we watched him disappear into the gloom, crouching, an automatic pistol in his palm.

We waited what seemed an interminable length of time. The shadows were deepening in the valley. The hound had lost its restless terror, and lay quiet at our feet.

"Robertson," I suddenly exclaimed, "you and I are a couple of chicken-hearts, beside that young chap. I'm afraid something has happened to him. I'm going after him."

"Push ahead. I'm right at your heels," he said.

Stooping to avoid knocking our brains out on the dripping roof, we followed the tortuous cavern for about fifty feet. Then, rounding a sharp turn, we came upon a strange scene, lighted by a flickering fire, the curling smoke of which found egress through some aperture in the roof of the cave.

Lying on a pile of ragged blankets was a man, gaunt, cadaverous, his beard matted, his grizzled hair long and tangled as a mop, his nose thin and beaklike, his eyes deep set under shaggy brows and flashing in the red firelight.

Seated beside him, tailor fashion, was Gordon Hyde, his eyes glued to the old man's face, his ears drinking in his words.

Silently Hyde motioned us to places at the fireside, and the old man went on with

his tale, which, apparently, he was just beginning.

"You-uns cain't onderstand what it is," he said, taking in Robertson and me with his eyes; "but when a man's floundered round in the jungles of Africy an' Brazil fer over twenty year, fightin' with all sorts of pizen snakes an' ferocious animals, and bloody-minded blacks an' Indians, an' then he thinks there ain't none on 'em as bad as them he left go free back hum, and then the sun sort of gits into his haid; well, it don't take much more after that fer him to come back and sort a set things right ag'in, like I swore to my pore pappy I would do. 'Git 'em, Schuyler, ef it takes you forty year. Remember, boy, what the Scripters says, "An eye fer an eye, an' a tooth fer a tooth, even unto the third an' fourth gineration of them that hate me.' Them was his very words.

"But to git it all in order so's you-uns'll understand. Heh, I ain't talked to white men fer so long, it tangles me all up. It all goes back to before the war. My pappy was secesh. Come up here from Virginy. He was the richest man in these parts. When the war broke out, these here mountings was all fer the Union. They made it mighty oncomfortable fer pappy, specially Judge Trimble an' Colonel Jim Shackelford, who run things pretty ginerally about these parts. An' one night they come to our house with a rope, an' told pappy they'd give him jest five hours to jine the company they was gittin' up fer the Lincoln army er he'd swing from the limb of the big sycamore in the co'te-house yard. Then they left pappy to make up his mind.

"Pappy seen there wer'n't nothin' else to do, so he kissed me an' mammy good-by an' lit out fer to jine the secesh army. I was eight year old then, an' I never seen him again till the war was over. Mammy took sick an' died about the third year. Now I know it wer'n't anything but grievin' fer pappy, an' the way everybody, even the womins folks, deviled her. They took me an' bound me out to ole Judge Trimble, an' he used to lam the daylights out of me jest fer the fun of it till I got to hate the whole yearth.

"When the war was over pappy come home. He was a captain, and had been right in all the fightin', an' be'n surrendered along with the rest of Lee's army. When he hearn how mammy'd died, an' how I'd be'n lammed about, an' how his house had ketched afire one night, mysterious-like, an' burnt, he never said nothin', but I seen 'im git white about the gills, an' seen his fists clench till they showed all white under the brown.

"He'd orta took me an' left, but he says no; that he's a goin' to stick it out right thar, an' show 'em that what Abe Lincoln said was true; that it was all a free country, an' the war over.

"But they wouldn't leave off pesterin' 'im. Pappy knowed a heap about Jedge Trimble an' Colonel Jim Shackelford, and the'r ways with the county money, an' they wasn't the kind that'd stand up to a fair fight, er even unsling a gun an' shoot a man down in hot blood. Ef they'd only done that, I could 'a' forgive 'em. But they laid out to git rid of him, hook er crook, an' so they put it up on him that he'd killed a wuthless, no-account nigger, an' then they all gets drawed on the jury so's they could hang him. They never give pappy no chanct. They jest hung 'im like a dawg fer an ornery nigger that wouldn't've fetched two hundred dollars, pappy said, in Virginy. An', men, I seen 'em do it.

"I was fourteen about, then. I ain't so old as you'd think; not more'n fifty. It's the sun an' the jungle an' that pictur' that's made these here white hairs.

"I left Jason with the pictur' in my mind. I jogged nigh plumb all over the world with it thar. Finally I took up with a German animal-ketcher fer circuses an' the like, and most of the time since I've be'n in Africy er South America, allus tryin' to run away from that pictur'. Many a night, lyin' out in the jungles, pappy's come to me and said, 'Git 'em, Schuyler, ef it takes you forty year.'

"An' then, one day the sun sorta got into my haid, an' I couldn't git the pictur' outen my mind. It never give me no peace after that, an' every day pappy would come an' say, 'Schuy, the forty year is mighty nigh up. Git 'em, Schuy, even unto the third an' fourth gineration.'

"But I never went about it in no ordinary way. I'd learnt too much from savages ever to use white man's ways. Fust, I sent 'em all warnin', full an' fair, an' money to git the'r lives insured, so as the'r famblies wouldn't suffer. Then I come up here to this place I'd knowed as a boy to let my jury set on 'em. Thar's my jury," and he waved a gaunt arm toward a cage in a corner of the cavern in which seven

tortoise-shell cats lay blinking at the firelight. "Thar ain't but seven on my jury now; thar was twelve when I left Belem at the mouth of the Amazon, but five on 'em died on the trip to Newerleans.

"Thar' ain't no appeal from the verdict of my jury, an' here's the verdict," and he reached out from where he lay and took from a shelf a half-pint whisky-flask. "Indian arrer-head pizen," he continued. "I reckon ef I hadn't ketched this here fever the night I visited the sentence of the court on Colonel Jim Shackelford, me an' the jury an' the curare would have got all twelve of 'em, 'even unto the third and fourth ginerations, the third and fourth ginerations.'"

He stopped speaking and lay clasping the bottle before his breast like a crucifix, while his fierce eyes took on an expression of crazed ecstasy. Hyde, Robertson, and myself sat like statues carved in stone.

Then suddenly, before either of us could put out a hand to stay him, his right hand swept across his bare chest, leaving four red scratches, while his right emptied the contents of the bottle over the bleeding wounds. Instantly the light went out of the staring eyes, and we were looking at a corpse.

It was several minutes before either of us spoke. Then Hyde said:

"It's better so. A mind crazed by years of solitude and sun and the early memory of a great tragedy; that is man's most merciful judgment. Let us believe that the mercy of God will not be less. This cavern is all the grave he needs, so let us leave him alone with his pets, which it will not be safe to turn loose on the world"; and, drawing his automatic, Hyde went up to the cage and put a merciful end to the seven tortoise-shell cats.

"Now," he said, when the reverberations of the fusillade had died away, "let us go."

"But the tracks," said Robertson, pointing to the bare feet upon the sorry bed. "He never made 'em."

"I forgot you hadn't seen them," said Hyde. "You know, I had quite a talk with him before you came. I'll show you the crocodile," and going to a dark corner he dragged out the most peculiar pair of boots I ever expect to see. "I'm going to keep these as a souvenir of the horrors of Knob Mountain. They are evidently of South American Indian workmanship, and made from the feet, claws and all, of the giant cayman of the Guayas."

FORWARD!

Because you may not scale the mountain-peak,
To comrade with the thunder-cloud or star,
Because your single arm may be too weak
To break Fate's bar,

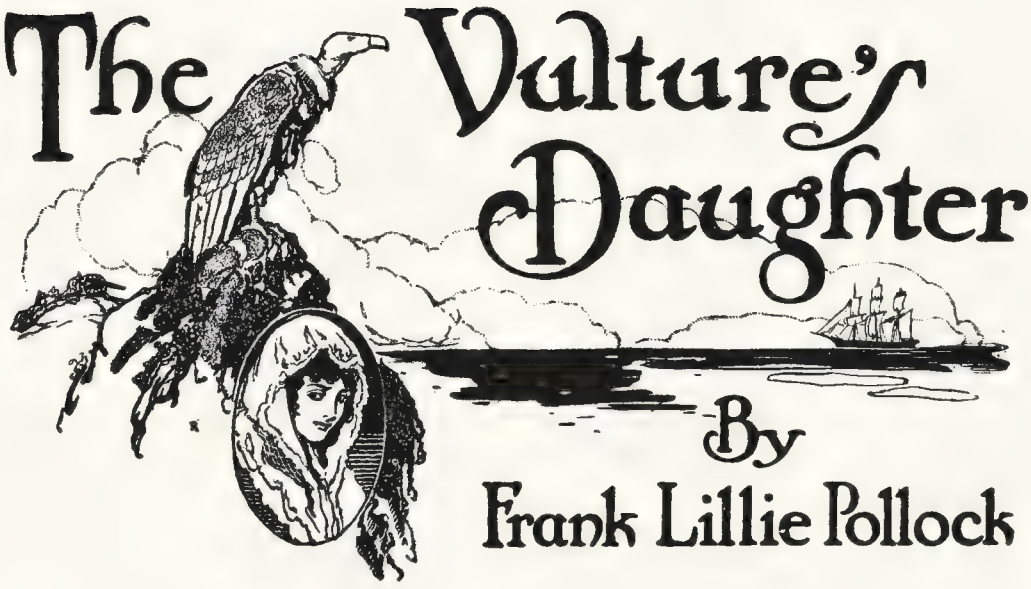
Shall you in sleepy indolence recline,
Or sigh for sterner souls to lead the way,
Until the sunlight blushes into wine
At your delay?

Because you fear to try the shoreless sea,
Alone, unpiloted, across the night;
Because your camp unfortified may be
For final fight,

Despair not! For if you but do your best,
With weaker weapons against greater things,
Remember, Heaven for the final test
Will lend you wings!

Get understanding. Minds alone are great.
Achieve and suffer. Souls alone endure.
Be ever steadfast, all-compassionate—
Reward is sure!

Robert Mackay.



SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

FAIRFAX, a young Southerner, in New York City in answer to an anonymous letter, goes to a certain house in East Thirty-Sixth Street where he meets a charming Spanish woman, and later gets into a fracas with two men, who suddenly appear, one of whom he shoots. The man, John Nelson, drops to the floor; his companion rushes off with Fairfax across the roof. Horrified by the outcome of the meeting, Fairfax goes blindly. A nightmare of a journey ensues; then when Fairfax, who has gone all to pieces through worry and fatigue, regains consciousness, he finds himself in a luxurious room in a sanatorium for the nervous rich. This, though he has not a cent in his pocket. His ease is cut short by the clerk's demanding the room. Fairfax suddenly runs into the man whom he has thought he has killed, and when he demands the meaning of the rigmarole through which he has gone, he is handed a twenty-dollar bill and told that he has missed the chance of his life.

CHAPTER V.

THE UNIVERSAL ADVISER.

NIGHT had fallen when Fairfax reached New York again, and the sleet-laden wind that swept the city seemed doubly bitter after the mellow Virginia sunshine. But he did not mind cold or darkness; his heart was full of a wonderful lightness, since the burden of crime was gone. He had hardly realized to what a depth of despair he had sunk, but now it seemed that a fresh life was opening before him.

He had about four dollars in his pocket, including the amount left from Nelson's twenty, after he had purchased his railway ticket. It was not much, and he knew well that there was not much hope of resuming his position at Wallenstein's, after five days of sudden and unexplained absence. Worse still, there was no money owing him there; he had drawn his week's salary the day before and had spent most of it on a new overcoat.

The overcoat would be welcome, anyhow, and it was at his boarding-house with all the rest of his possessions. With a slight tinge of apprehension he remembered that his board was two or three days overdue; he had been at the house only a few weeks and could hardly expect credit.

But New York was the city of magnificent chances, and he was still too joyous to let petty details trouble him, as he took the Elevated train from the ferry to his uptown boarding-house.

"Why, Mr. Fairfax!" his landlady cried when he appeared. "I rented your room yesterday. I didn't think you were coming

This story began in The Cavalier for June.

back, when you sent an expressman for your trunk."

"My trunk? I didn't send for it," Fairfax stammered.

"But the expressman came for it day before yesterday. I don't know as I ought to have let it go, especially as your board wasn't quite paid, but I thought you'd settle all right. It's only three dollars."

"Let it go? Of course you shouldn't have let it go without my order, madam!" cried Fairfax, realizing the enormity of this loss. "Good heavens! is the whole world trying to rob me? Were all my things in it?"

"Do you think I'd steal your things?" the outraged lady replied, no less hotly. "The expressman said he came from you, and I think you ought to take better care of your trunk. And I'll thank you to kindly hand me the money you owe me."

In too violent a rage to consider the consequences, Fairfax dashed three dollars on the hall table and banged out. It was only after ten minutes in the icy wind had cooled his spirits that he remembered that he had only a dollar left.

What had become of his trunk? Had he been merely the victim of a common theft, or was the world really in a conspiracy to cheat him, to bewilder him, to trick him, to drive him mad? The glaring improbabilities of the last few days rolled over him again—the anonymous letter, the trap, the flight, the hotel. Chambers must have spent several hundred dollars on him in the affair; it was hardly likely that at the root of it all was a conspiracy to steal his poor trunk! And yet no one but Chambers, or the *señora,* or Nelson, could have known of the opportunity.

New York no longer looked like the city of magnificent chances as he wandered homeless down Amsterdam Avenue, one hand in his pocket clutching four silver quarters. Then, at least, he was determined not to lose. It was not much, but it was enough to stave off freezing and hunger for a day.

He slept that night in a hotel on Third Avenue—how different, alas! from the Beechwoods — where he paid seventy-five cents for his room. Ten cents more went for breakfast, and he faced the world with the rest of his dollar.

His first proceeding was naturally to go to Wallenstein's, where a very brief interview with the manager convinced him that there was no hope in that direction. Mr. Wallenstein had been indignant that he should have left without notice in the busy season; another clerk had already taken his place, but the manager called him back as he turned to say that if he would come round again in the course of two or three weeks they might find something for him.

But a great abyss lay between that day and the next month, a void which he would have to bridge somehow. Fairfax searched the "wanted" columns of the newspapers; he applied for countless positions, but he always came too late or was dismissed after the briefest parley. Again, he was appalled to find how little use the word had for a young man of various accomplishments.

He spent his second night in a Salvation Army shelter, was given a breakfast of coffee and bread, and was asked to cut wood for an hour in payment. It was still early when he was turned into the streets again to confront a city that still owed him half a million dollars.

He was not even in a position to buy a newspaper to look for possible situations, and he walked down to one of the great newspaper offices and joined the crowd of outcasts who hover round the sheets that a merciful publisher pastes outside on bulletin boards.

He saw a great number of vacant positions that he thought he might fill, but most of them were at a great distance. He had no money for car-fares, and he felt incapable of walking for several miles, with probable disappointment at the end of the tramp.

Nevertheless, since he had to do something, he strolled slowly up Broadway, block after block, mile after mile, till he came finally to Union Square. There, utterly weary, he sat down upon a bench.

It had turned warmer in the night, and the sun shone almost with a Virginian mildness. His energy had all evaporated. He had even forgotten the address of the situation he was to seek in this locality. He was content to sit there, and simply exist; to do nothing, to think of nothing, and he watched the cars swerve roaring round the square till he seemed to sit in the midst of a whirlpool of things that swung endlessly round and round him without ever touching his own life.

He sat there for a long time. The noon

hour came and passed. Finally a cold wind brought him to himself, and he arose, stiffened and chilled.

The sky had clouded; the winter sunshine was over. He walked aimlessly round the park, past the benches filled with shivering vagabonds exchanging sour glances with the policemen who strolled past. Hurrying people jostled him; boys were already crying evening papers; a bootblack hurried up to him, glanced into his face, and turned away. A man distributing circulars thrust a paper into his hand.

Fairfax glanced at it with faint curiosity. It bore the portrait of an elderly man with a pointed white beard, a benevolent and sagacious face, and a vague resemblance to King Edward the Seventh. Above the portrait were the words:

MR. MONTGOMERY JACKSON,

Universal Adviser.

And underneath:

Mr. Jackson is prepared to furnish expert advice on all questions, except medical and legal ones, at moderate rates. No payment will be accepted unless satisfaction is given. (over)

Fairfax turned the sheet over, and read:

Who has not felt the need, at difficult and perplexing periods of his existence, of wise and unprejudiced advice given by some one old in years and skilled in life?

Mr. Jackson, ex-colonel in the Ninth U. S. Cavalry, ex-consul of the United States to Attica, has had ten times the experience of life that falls to the lot of most men, and is prepared to be of service to the public by giving confidential and expert advice on all imaginable matters, excepting only medical and legal questions. Mr. Jackson has had—

Fairfax glanced through the rest of the ill-conceived eulogy, which, nevertheless, seemed to contain gleams of genuineness. He perceived instantly what a long-felt want such an adviser would fill, if such an adviser could be. Certainly it was a want he himself felt badly in need of—as the circular put it—at this difficult and perplexing period of his existence. No satisfaction, no pay were the terms, and they exactly met his wishes, for he did not really look for light or help. What he longed for, though half-unconsciously, was kindly counsel, human sympathy, and the fact that it might be given as professionally as a physician's made no difference.

The office of the universal adviser was almost within a stone's throw, a little way east on Eighteenth Street, and Fairfax thrust the circular in his pocket and turned across the square.

CHAPTER VI.

A DINNER INVITATION.

THE house was one of considerable faded dignity, standing on the debatable ground between the east and west sides. Probably it had once been the home of wealth, but now, to an experienced eye, it betrayed subtle indications that furnished rooms might be rented within.

Fairfax half expected to find the adviser's rooms thronged with waiting clients; but the maid-servant who took his name showed him into a front parlor, where he was absolutely alone. The universal adviser was engaged. Doubtless some one else was extracting wisdom from omniscience.

At the end of fifteen minutes or so the maid reappeared, and invited Fairfax to pass through a door at the rear of the parlor.

Doing so, Fairfax found himself in a snugly furnished room, half study and half sitting-room, where an elderly man sat comfortably in a great easy-chair before an open grate. He was smoking a cigar that diffused an odor of remarkably excellent tobacco, and, as he slightly turned, Fairfax recognized the features of Mr. Montgomery Jackson much as the printed portrait had shown them.

"I saw one of your circulars—I wished to consult you, Mr. Jackson," he said, hesitating somewhat.

"It is quite unnecessary for you to say so; your errand is plain in your face. Please sit down," replied the adviser in a benevolently offhand manner, indicating another easy-chair where the light from the south window fell strong on the young man's face. There was something in Mr. Jackson's voice that seemed vaguely familiar; he seemed to have heard that voice before. But he was not in a condition to search his memory. He was anxious, almost frightened, almost palpitating with expectation, as he discovered, to his own wonder. It was really as if he hoped to

hear something that would clear his position and smooth his future.

"It is hardly advice so much as enlightenment that I need," Fairfax continued. "I have become involved in a very singular chain of events—my case is most peculiar—"

"All cases seem so, and none of them are really so," the adviser interrupted him. "Human situations—including the most remarkable—can all be classed in ninety-seven different categories. As for your case, it is plain. You are young, you are poor, you are ambitious. The remedy is simple. But beware, young man! A fortune is often only too easily gained."

"My experience has been otherwise," returned Fairfax. "I began five years ago, with ambition, as you say; with energy, with the best equipment I could attain. I was prepared to spare no labor and to take the riskiest chances. And now I find myself no farther ahead—even somewhat behind. I am convinced," he added dolefully, "that a fortune is a matter of—well, of fortune, and that the successful man is simply the lucky gambler."

"Mr. Fairfax," the adviser said impressively, "I am fifty-eight years old—the prime of life, I call it. When I was twelve I was an orphan and penniless; at twenty I graduated from Yale university, and had gold in my pocket. I was an officer in the Civil War, and since then I have been the diplomatic representative of the United States in no less than eight European cities. I have been twice around the world. I have been married three times, divorced once, and twice a widower. I have had six children, all of whom are dead. I have made and spent three fortunes, each probably quite as large as the one you hope to attain. I mention these things to show you that there are few sides of human experience that I have not touched, and to impress the truth of what I say—that, take at random any man of fair intelligence and let him trust to me, let him be a machine acting from my knowledge of life, and I will guarantee to make him wealthy in ten years."

Fairfax was but little cheered by this stimulating opinion. He glanced round the room, comfortable indeed, but with no evidence of wealth, and he perceived the landscape of clothes-lines through the rear window.

"It may be so," he ventured to say. "Yet from appearances I would judge you to be far from being a millionaire."

"Because my experience has taught me that it is not worth what it costs," replied Mr. Jackson. My life is past its period of action. I contemplate; I fear nothing on earth, and I am content to live on two or three thousand dollars a year, which I make chiefly by advising other people."

"If you would take me in hand and make me very rich, I would be greatly indebted to you," said Fairfax. "But we are wandering from the subject, are we not? I came to lay my case before you, and to see what light you could throw on it."

"Proceed," said Mr. Jackson, composing himself in his chair and closing his eyes, while he extracted the last puffs from his cigar.

Fairfax thereupon began to unburden himself of the perilous stuff that had weighed upon his mind, detailing all his adventures from the moment he had received the letter of "Paradise Lost." The universal adviser listened with apparent attention, and made no comment till the story had reached the point of the pistol-shot. Then he threw the butt of his cigar into the grate and selected a fresh one.

"Pardon me a few moments," he said. "I allow nothing to interfere with the first puffs of a newly-lighted good cigar. I would commend the practise to you; for one of the essentials of success is to know the value of occasional happy moments."

So Fairfax sat silent while he lighted the fresh cigar and smoked it delicately and with complete enjoyment for half a minute. Then, "You will please continue," said Mr. Jackson.

Fairfax continued, through the episodes of his flight with Chambers, his stay at Beechwoods, and his return to New York, winding up with the loss of his trunk.

"And now I should be glad to hear which of the ninety-seven classes this case falls into," he said.

Mr. Jackson opened his eyes and gazed at his client.

"It certainly is a strange case—a very remarkable case," he said briskly. "A thousand thanks for bringing it to me, Mr. Fairfax; it is a long time since I have enjoyed anything so much."

"Oh, as an entertainment—" began Fairfax indignantly.

"As a specimen of life's intricacies. But it seems to me that you need the services

of a detective, rather than of a human expert, as I call myself. But, speaking in an unprofessional way, it seems to me that, as it is evident that no harm was meant you—"

"No harm? To steal my trunk? To make me lose my means of making a living?"

"Those are only trivial matters."

"Excuse me! I assure you they are very vital matters."

"In a year from now you will see that they were of no importance. I was about to say that evidently no harm was meant you, but it is equally evident that the affair is probably not yet closed. For that reason I would think that you might avoid inconvenience by leaving New York for a time."

"I would have no sort of objection to that, provided the means were afforded me," said Fairfax.

The universal adviser surveyed Fairfax keenly, seemed to withdraw into himself for meditation for some moments. Then he straightened up, laid down his cigar, and leaned toward his client.

"Mr. Fairfax," he said gravely, "I have been the custodian of many strange secrets. I know the pitiful inner workings of many human lives. Will you assist at a grand act of justice, a magnificent restitution?"

"But what have I to restore?" asked the young man, bewildered.

"No—no. It is another man who will make the restitution. You would simply be the agent—and it would be worth something to you."

"Do you mean money? What would it be worth?"

"Well, a large sum. At a guess, I might say two hundred thousand dollars. But there are dangers. You would take your life in your hand from the moment you accepted the task."

Fairfax's heart made a sudden bound at the mention of this sum. He had been poor so long, failure had for so long been his portion that he could scarcely believe the great chance had at last presented itself.

"I'd take a good deal of risk for that much money," he managed to say. "Of course it isn't anything unlawful?" he added, with a sudden, keen suspicion.

"Do you think I am a man to propose a crime to you?" cried the adviser indignantly. "I say it's an act of justice."

"But justice on whom? You must explain a little more."

"Come and dine with me this evening, and we will talk it all over. Do you agree? Good; then, at seven o'clock. And here," he fumbled in his pocket and produced a five-dollar bill, which he held out to Fairfax. "I'm so sure that you will accept the undertaking that I'll give you this now as an advance—like the queen's shilling, you know. Yes—I insist. It's been worth more than that to hear your remarkable story, which I really think I shall have to put in a ninety-eighth category, by itself."

CHAPTER VII.

THE ONE MAN LIVING.

IT was a long time to Fairfax, those hours until seven o'clock. Casting about for some means of killing them, he wandered down to the Astor library and read magazines, or, at least, he thumbed over the leaves. But he was incapable of fixing his mind on anything printed.

He would gladly, if he could, have forgotten the confusion of his situation, and abandoned himself for a while to warmth and rest. But a fever, rising from mental excitement and physical weariness, burned his veins. The idea of the mysterious but magnificent act of justice by which he was to make two hundred thousand dollars at the risk of his life now filled his mind, and now it gave place to the weary effort to solve the puzzle of what he had already suffered, and again he thrilled with feverish projects for the future.

Yet the time dragged on somehow until the reading-room closed at six o'clock. He walked slowly up to Eighteenth Street, made the circuit of the block two or three times to pass the last fifteen minutes, and finally rang Mr. Jackson's bell as the hour struck.

The same maid-servant ushered him in, directly to the room at the rear this time. As the door opened he caught the glitter of a small table laid for dinner in the center of the room, and at one side of the fireplace sat Mr. Jackson, and at the other—

Fairfax stopped short, dumfounded. Was it possible that this woman, darkly handsome in the black lace of her dinner gown,

was the nameless "*señora,*" was "Paradise Lost," to whose accursed letter he owed all his trouble. Yet he could hardly be mistaken, and the smile of recognition she gave him verified it.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Fairfax," said the universal adviser, shaking his hand warmly. "You see I was able to help you, after all. Though I didn't say so, I was able to recognize this lady from your description, and I asked her to dine with us, in the hope that she may be able to tell you something more than I can—about your trunk. It's hardly necessary to introduce you formally, is it—to Mrs. Montroy?"

Fairfax bestowed a faint inclination of his head upon the lady, and a glance charged with angry question upon Mr. Jackson.

"I have done more," the adviser continued cheerfully. "Mrs. Montroy was able to give me the address of the man who left the city with you, and I have secured him also. Mr. Chambers will be here at half-past eight."

"Mrs. Montroy will not be surprised," said Fairfax stiffly, "if I ask her to kindly give me the explanation of all this mysterious persecution which I have suffered."

"Immediately," he added with emphasis, but at that moment a dress-coated waiter entered with a silver tureen.

"Not before dinner!" cried the universal adviser. "I may have some explanations to make myself, but they go best with a full stomach. Will you take that place, Mrs. Montroy?—and you, Mr. Fairfax, this one? It is not often that I give a dinner-party, and I beg that you will let good-will compensate for a myriad shortcomings."

In spite of his wrath, Fairfax's empty body yearned toward the delicious odor that steamed from the soup, and, almost involuntarily, he slipped into the chair assigned him. After all, explanations could wait for an hour.

The dinner, it appeared, was served from a French restaurant a few doors away, and it indicated that Mr. Jackson was fitted to give advice on gastronomy, if on nothing else. It was accompanied by a fine Rhine wine, pale green and aromatic, and, later, by a modest portion of champagne. And the first hot mouthful of the soup, and the first drops of the wine seemed to run electrically through Fairfax's half-starved frame. His spirits rose and mellowed immediately, and he found himself looking upon his companions with almost a friendly eye.

Wonderful is the virtue of food, of drink, of warmth, and the poignant bitterness melted out of Fairfax's heart. His resolve to have full satisfaction remained, but for the present he was content to let it lie in abeyance. This was an hour of truce, and he exerted himself to enter into the spirit of gaiety set up by Mrs. Montroy and the adviser, who, as the dinner progressed, seemed to be upon the footing of old friends.

Mr. Jackson was in great form as a host, obviously exerting every artifice of a high degree of social skill to make the dinner a success. He told inimitable stories of experiences in queer countries and odd corners, told them with the skill of a practised reconteur, and Mrs. Montroy kept the ball rolling with witty comments and replies. Between them they kept up a brilliant fire of talk, to which Fairfax endeavored to add occasional flashes; and finally he set them both in a roar by a humorous account of his late life among the millionaires.

As they were finishing dessert, Jackson was called to the telephone in the hall.

"Mr. Chambers is on his way," he said, when he came back. "He will be here almost immediately. I find that I am obliged to go out for a few minutes, if you will excuse me, Mr. Fairfax. I leave you to entertain Mrs. Montroy."

He set out a flask of curacao on the table, with tiny glasses, cigars, and cigarettes, and departed. The front door slammed behind him.

Mrs. Montroy's desire for conversation seemed to go with him. She had moved from the table back to her easy-chair by the fire, and she sat silent, thoughtfully looking into the grate, and twisting the numerous rings that adorned her fingers. Fairfax half expected something important from her, but as she did not speak, he also remained silent; in the pleasant placidity of digestion.

"I suppose you are very angry at me for what I have done to you, Mr. Fairfax," she said, at last, languidly raising her fine eyes to his face.

"Not so angry as I was," Fairfax answered. "Still, I don't deny a certain

rancor. Why on earth did you do this thing?"

"Well, it was Jackson's idea, principally. I was opposed to it. I was quite satisfied with you as you were."

Fairfax raised his hands in a gesture of bewilderment.

"Please—no more puzzles. Remember that I know nothing of what you're talking about. What was Jackson's idea?"

"To test you."

"But for what?"

"Did he say nothing to you of an enterprise—"

"He spoke of a great restitution—a magnificent act of justice, as he called it. But what is it?"

The woman's face became at once animated, and her eyes sparkled.

"It's all that, and more," she began, and stopped, interrupted by the noisy opening of the hall door. They heard footsteps, voices, and a man entered, the man with the dark, bold face and the military bearing, who had called himself Chambers. Behind him appeared the benign face of the universal adviser.

He was expecting it, but the sight of this man brought back such a keen recollection of all he had suffered, that he rose quickly, with an abrupt angry exclamation. But Chambers held out his hand, looking him keenly in the face, and the young man could not refuse to grasp it, though in silence and with no heartiness.

"I met Jackson on the street and came back with him," Chambers observed, with an air of breaking the ice. He greeted Mrs. Montroy with curt, familiar courtesy, picked up a cigar, walked to the mantel and stood with his back to the fire.

"Well," he said, "I suppose we all owe you sincere apologies, Mr. Fairfax, and it is to be hoped that you will forgive us. I dare say we went about it the wrong way, and maybe we went too far. But under the circumstances we could hardly do anything else. I won't ask you to overlook it till after you've heard what we've got to say, however. And the time has come to have it all out."

"I am extremely glad to hear it," said Fairfax, with emphasis.

Chambers had spoken with elaborate carelessness, but Fairfax thought he saw acute anxiety in his eyes. He glanced at Mrs. Montroy, who hardly seemed to breathe, clenching her tiny handkerchief in a wad so tightly that the muscles stood corded on her hand. Mr. Jackson alone preserved his complete equanimity, but he was watching the Carolinian with undisguised interest.

Fairfax felt certain that something momentous was coming at last, and his heart beat faster.

"What have you to say, then?" he demanded, with an effort to speak indifferently.

"Just this: There is a thing to be done that will probably save many lives, that will raise hundreds of people from despair to happiness, that will bring justice on a wretch not fit to live—and will make the man who does it magnificently wealthy. And you are probably the only man on earth who can do it."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BIRD OF PREY.

FAIRFAX had expected anything but a statement so amazing as this. He stared incredulously, but there was deadly earnestness in Chambers's eye.

"I?" he hesitated. "How? What do you mean?"

"Did you ever hear of Daniel Burke?"

The name sounded very familiar, but in Fairfax's excited condition he failed to place it.

"'Vulture' Burke — the grafter — the wrecker?" Chambers went on.

Then the young man remembered, though the career of that eminent scoundrel had been run before his time. But the facts of it had passed into New York history, forming one of its blackest pages.

"I've heard of him, of course," he said. "But what has he got to do with it. He's dead, isn't he?"

"Let me explain it," Mr. Jackson broke in. "No, Burke isn't dead. Do you recollect his history? Well, I'll tell you just a little of it.

"Burke landed in New York a poor man —a penniless, Irish steerage immigrant. In ten or twelve years he had, heaven only knows how many stolen dollars.

"Like several other eminent ward politicians, he began at the bottom. He came in touch with the "heelers;" he was useful; he came at last to be needed by

Reilley, Ford, Bristoll, the heads of the gang that was in power at the city hall. It happened to be a time when the government of this city was in the hands of the worst ring that ever came out of the bottomless pit. They found Burke a useful tool at first. They pushed him ahead. But Burke was a man with a deep brain and an armor-plated conscience, and it wasn't long before they were the tools, and he was the master.

"No one really knows, and probably it never will be known, just how much money he made, nor just how he made it. At one time he was supposed to be worth ten or fifteen millions, but this was probably an exaggeration. Besides, he often lost heavily on the stock exchange, which he played incessantly.

"At first he used to graft through the police. Later, he took to crooked contracts with the city, by means of the influence he controlled, and I suppose this gave him his first taste of real finance. Likely he found it more profitable, as well as more respectable, for his next enterprise was the affair of the First Avenue railroad. You've heard of that, of course—how he wrecked it, bought and sold it. He must have cleared three or four millions by that little transaction alone.

"He turned several similar tricks, but his crowning coup was the establishment of the Bank of the Republic — and it was what led to his fall."

At the name of this institution, Fairfax started. He had his own reasons for remembering the Bank of the Republic. A maiden aunt who lived in the north had put all her money into that institution, and he would have inherited the twenty thousand dollars that went to fill Daniel Burke's pocket.

"The Bank of the Republic!" he exclaimed. "I was a loser by that myself—indirectly."

"Then you're in the same boat with the rest of us," Jackson responded. "Burke looted the bank at his leisure, and when he was ready he disappeared. He left things arranged so as to throw suspicion on the cashier, who had no notion of what was going on. The cashier was arrested; the evidence of complicity, at least, was too strong, and he served eighteen months in Sing Sing for it."

"And Burke?" demanded Fairfax.

"Burke went to Mexico, where extradition in those days was difficult. He managed to take all his money with him, and his family—his two children, that is, for his wife was dead. But he married again in Mexico, became naturalized as a Mexican citizen, and then appeared to drop out of sight.

"However, three or four years later, he was foolish to venture across to New Orleans, and he was spotted and arrested. The power of his old gang was weakened in New York just then, and after a hard-fought trial, he was sent to prison for six years.

"At the end of two years he was pardoned. Some kind of a compromise had been effected. He restored a few thousand dollars, swore it was all he had left, and, besides, he was very low in health and not likely to live long.

"He went back to Mexico, but prison life must have broken his nerves. He lived in mortal terror of losing the rest of his plunder, and he proceeded to buy an island."

"Medilla Island," Chambers put in.

"Medilla Island, off Yucatan. It was only twenty-five or thirty square miles, and it had been totally uninhabited till Burke colonized it with several negro and Mexican families. He built a great house on it and went there to live with all his loot, and his two children. His Mexican wife died while he was in prison, I forgot to say.

"He has been there ever since, and no member of the colony has been allowed to leave it, with his consent. He got himself appointed governor of the place—you know how appointments can be got in Mexico—and he has the right to fortify it, to arm his men, and to hang, draw, and quarter pretty much as he pleases. There he lives like a feudal baron, or a robber chief. They raise on the island almost everything they use. Twice a year they send a schooner over to Tampico or Vera Cruz with sugar, molasses and so-forth, to trade for the few things they can't produce. No strange vessel has ever landed on the island. None can ever land."

"But why not?" Fairfax asked.

"The island is surrounded by a belt of impassable swamps. There is only one landing-place, a long, narrow harbor that Burke dredged out through the swamps—and it is sown thick with mines and tor-

pedoes. Any vessel would be blown to atoms if it tried to go in there without knowing the channel."

"Good Lord!" Fairfax exclaimed, wondering.

His imagination was strongly seized by the picture of the old outlaw in his fortified hold in the Caribbean, with no one knew how many millions of stolen gold and trembling in the midst of his armed men. And a personal touch was added by the fact that there was money there which should rightfully have come to him.

"The Vulture's nest!" commented Mrs. Montroy.

"Romantic situation for the twentieth century, isn't it?" said the universal adviser, with appreciation. "It seems a pity to spoil it, but so it must be. And that brings us to our scheme—which you have probably guessed."

"Vaguely," Fairfax replied. "I imagine that you intend somehow to make the Vulture disgorge. But I don't see how you are going to do it, nor how I can be of any particular use to you."

"Mr. Fairfax," said Jackson, with sudden solemnity, "you mentioned that you had lost by the Bank of the Republic. As for me, I told you that I had made and lost two fortunes. The first of them was invested in the First Avenue railroad. I came out of that affair a beggar. Three hundred thousand dollars is what Daniel Burke stole from me, and I got off lightly, compared to others. "Chambers here—"

Chambers's face was grim as he spoke.

"I count eighteen months in prison worth more than any money," he said. "Besides, I had all my savings in the bank when it broke. When I meet Burke next I'll have as little mercy on him as he had for me. I was the Bank of the Republic's cashier."

"And I," said Mrs. Montroy, "I lost more than that. I had just been married. My husband was in business, when the bursting of one of Burke's bubbles ruined him. He tried hard to recover himself. He was driven to the wall. He—forged another man's signature, and when he was discovered, he shot himself dead. What Daniel Burke owes me is—death!"

A dead silence fell on the room, emphasizing the low-toned intensity of the woman's words. Fairfax began dimly to realize the tremendous vendetta that had bound these three together. He, too, was already entangled in it, and already he felt that his sympathies were on its side.

"Well, we are only a few of a great many," Jackson resumed, at last. "Nelson, the man you thought you had shot, was broken by some of Burke's fraudulent contracts. There are hundreds, thousands, of others, but we four have been using every means for years to get at the man who wrecked us. The law cannot touch him now. He has theoretically served his sentence. Besides, he is a Mexican citizen, and legally governor of his island. To attempt anything by force would be sheer filibustering. But we have never given up the attempt, and never will, till we have succeeded. But I think we are near success now, with your help."

"Certainly I would help you if I could," said Fairfax. "But how can I?"

"Burke had two children, a son and a daughter, both very young when they went to Medilla Island. Neither of them left it, till the son grew to be twenty or so. Then he grew restive; he wanted to leave. Finally he escaped, stowed himself away on the semi-annual schooner, and got to Vera Cruz. That was seven years ago. For the last five years he has not been heard of. In all probability he is dead."

Jackson paused, and concentrated his gaze on the Carolinian's face.

"I met that young man, Charles Burke, in Arizona, five years ago," he added. "He was about your age, height, build, and complexion, Fairfax—and he had one gray eye and one brown one."

A formless notion of the desperate thing that Jackson was about to propose flashed into Fairfax's mind.

"You don't mean that you want me to—to—" he began, and stopped.

"We want you to pass yourself as Charles Burke for a few days. You will land on Medilla Island, as the returned prodigal. In a week at most you can learn just how the place is defended. You can find a way to put the defenses out of business—cut the electric wires, hide the cartridges or destroy them, and do something to the mines so as to make the channel safe. Then you will give us a signal, and a boat-load of men can land and capture the whole place without the slightest trouble."

Fairfax drew a long breath. The thing was out at last. He looked at the uni-

versal adviser, and from him to Mrs. Montroy and Chambers.

"The scheme is perfectly insane," he said. "I'd be detected instantly. Do you think Burke wouldn't know his own son?"

Jackson smiled. "That's our strong point. Burke contracted some eye disease in prison, and he has been all but blind for several years."

"But you said there was a daughter."

"She was only a child when her brother went away, and she wouldn't remember accurately how he looked seven years ago."

"But the people on the island — the Mexican tenants?"

"None of them will have remembered Charles Burke so well that they'd challenge you when once they see you accepted by the family. You have a good general resemblance to the man, and then seven years' absence would account for any changes. Besides, the peculiarity of your eyes will cover everything."

"But suppose I am spotted?"

"Then you would be hanged. Burke is judge and jury on his own island. But you won't be."

"But how about the knowledge of the island that young Burke would be supposed to have?"

"I'll coach you up."

"But how have you learned so much about it?"

"We've made it our business for years. Besides, one of Burke's Mexicans deserted from the schooner two years ago, and I got everything out of him that he knew."

"And what am I to get for risking my neck?"

"Two hundred thousand dollars. It will be subscribed by the ones who profit most by your act."

Fairfax rose and walked uneasily up and down. He felt the prickly flush of excitement over his whole body. The adventure tempted him strongly.

"But how did you come to pick me out for this scheme?" he cried. "From what Mrs. Montroy said, I suppose you were at the bottom of this nightmare that I've been going through."

"Of course we were," replied Mr. Jackson blandly. "For a long time we have been vaguely contemplating some such scheme as this, but we couldn't find an actor for the leading part. Mrs. Montroy discovered you. You had the eyes, and you spoke Mexican Spanish, and that was almost enough. She thought it was quite enough, but we had to find out what nerve, what courage, what resource you had. We wanted to see how you would behave with a pretty woman—"

Mrs. Montroy laughed softly.

"—what you would do when your life was threatened; how you would act when you thought you had killed a man; how you would take it when you found yourself homeless and friendless. We wanted to test your temper in every way."

"I'm afraid I didn't shine," said Fairfax. "You had me scared stiff."

"No, you made good. You've no idea what cowards men are. Nine out of ten would have gone to pieces, but you held up. The fact that we've trusted you proves that."

"The whole thing must have cost you a pretty penny. At the Beechwoods—"

"I've had dealings of old with the owner of the Beechwoods," said Jackson. "I can always command a room for a few days there without its costing me anything."

"Ah," Fairfax remembered, "and my victim, John Nelson, as you called him, said something about my having had a chance to make a fortune if I had had the sand. Was that—"

"Simply a twisting of the knife in the wound, as it were—an ingenious trick to make you feel worse."

"I'm glad of that. He gave me a good many bad moments with it. And—what about my trunk?"

"Safely in storage. You can have it back when you want it. You decline our offer, then?"

There was a note of inexpressible contempt in Jackson's voice that stung.

"I don't say that I do," Fairfax responded. "Look here, is there to be any bloodshed if you take the island? Do you contemplate killing anybody?"

"No, no," Jackson hastily assured him. "If you do your part of the work well there will be no resistance, and no need to hurt anybody. We will even leave Burke plenty of money to live on for the rest of his life. There's no use, you know, in trying to reimburse everybody who lost money through the Vulture. We'd never come to the end of them. But the books of the bank are still on file, and we can find exactly what he owes the depositors.

"I'll show you a photograph of Vulture

Burke," Jackson added, turning to his desk. "It's more than ten years old. Few people have seen him since that time, and you must be prepared for great changes."

Fairfax looked at the grim, hard-cut face, which all the well-meant retouching of the photographer had failed to essentially soften. A heavy, unkempt mustache and short beard hid the mouth, whose determined lines could only be divined, but the massive nose, the powerful jaw, the small, cruel, wrinkled eyes indicated the strong and ruthless human beast of prey. And as he looked at the brutal face of the grafter, Fairfax felt his heart warm to the scheme of despoiling him.

He stared at the photograph for a long time, thinking, while every one watched him in painful suspense.

"Who are his fighting men on the island? All Mexicans?" he asked suddenly.

"I think so. Impossible to be sure. But I doubt if there are more than two dozen grown men on the island. He depends chiefly on the difficulty of landing. In the house itself, besides the servants, there are only himself and his daughter—what's the girl's name?"

"Kathleen," said Mrs. Montroy.

"Yes—and Dr. Valga."

"You didn't mention him before."

"One thing at a time is enough. But you'll hear plenty of him yet. Burke had him come to the island as a resident private physician, when his health broke. He's a Cuban, educated in the United States. By degrees I think Valga has become Burke's right hand in most ways. He acts as steward of the estate; he comes over with the schooner and looks after the trading of the goods. I shouldn't be surprised to learn that he was really the directing force of the island by now. Anyhow, he's the only man to fear."

"I should think so. He'll certainly recognize me."

"By no means. He came to the island two years after you left it. He has never set eyes on you."

Fairfax began to walk up and down again, and finally stopped before the fire, staring into the coals in perplexity. But what he saw there was a green tropic island set in a turquoise tropic sea.

"Don't hurry," said Chambers. "Take a night to think it over."

"Take a week," said Mrs. Montroy.

But Fairfax felt himself drifting toward decision like a boat on a rapid stream. The city of desperate chances had proffered him one at last, richer and more desperate than the best he could have imagined. And it was a work of justice into the bargain.

"I don't need a week," he said. "I don't need a night. I'll take the job, and the sooner we can start for Medilla Island the better I'll be pleased."

CHAPTER IX.

MEDILLA ISLAND.

AS he looked back, Fairfax saw the loom of the vessel's mainsail already diminished to a mere blur in the dark. He could see not one of the faces that lined the rail, watching his departure, as he knew, with such absorbed interest. The almost whispered cheers were silent.

The drift of the light gulf airs were carrying the schooner momentarily from him. He had cut loose from his allies. His work lay in the opposite direction.

In that opposite direction Medilla Island rose vast against the moonless but luminous tropic night. It was less than half a mile away, and a heavy smell came from the swamps, and the sea swished with a monotonous murmur upon the obscure beaches.

Not a glimmer of light showed on the slopes of the island, but at its highest point he could see the white glitter of electric lights. He fancied that he made out the dim lines of a great building, set castle-like upon the heights. Imagination or not, the building was there; he was in sight of the nest of the Vulture.

They had dropped him directly off the harbor mouth, though he could not see it. He would have to grope for it in the dark, but the sea was smooth. He sat down and took the oars, and as he turned he saw that his schooner was all but indistinguishable in the distance.

It was just two weeks after that memorable dinner in the rooms of the universal adviser. They had lost no time; at least, they had lost none in New York, for he had started at once with Mrs. Montroy, Chambers, and Jackson for New Orleans, where John Nelson had joined the party. It was a renewal of acquaintance that gave Fairfax no pleasure, and he wished Nelson was out of it.

From New Orleans they crossed to Havana, which was to be the center of operations. Here they delayed for over a week, and Jackson coached him ceaselessly upon his new rôle, priming him with all the scanty information available about Medilla Island and the personality of its inhabitants. He was called "Charles" continually, to accustom himself to the new name; his companions unremittingly spoke to him and treated him as if he were really the son of the old brigand, till he actually began to have a dazed feeling of doubt in his own identity.

Meanwhile Chambers and Nelson were engaged in other mysterious preparations, of which Fairfax saw only the result, when Chambers announced that a schooner had been hired, and that they would embark the following day from Medilla Island.

Even Mrs. Montroy insisted on going to see the great adventure launched. It was a short run from Havana to the island, and they sighted the land about sunset—a gray-green, rounded outline, rising in a rather sharp slope from all sides toward the center.

With a strong glass they could see the black line of swamps along the water, and the long seams of dry arrayos down the hillsides. There were green patches and squares that marked woodland and cultivated fields, and the tiny outlines of a great, rambling house showed faintly on the crest of the island.

After some reconnoitering, the glasses showed also the harbor entrance, a just visible break among the swamps on the northern side. But they dared not approach nearer than was absolutely necessary while the light lasted. It was not till long after dark that they crept up to the harbor, and it was after midnight when Fairfax dropped over the side into a small boat and cast off.

Around his waist he wore a buckskin belt containing a hundred five-dollar gold coins, in case bribery should happen to be called for, and they were the only weapons he carried. Audacity alone could carry the enterprise through.

He was to be allowed ten days. On the eleventh night from then the schooner would again lie off the island at midnight, and a code of signals was arranged, to say whether all was ready or not for the last act.

The water broke in phosphorescence from his oar-blades as he rowed shoreward, on surely the most hazardous adventure that even the Spanish main has ever seen. He felt that he would have quite lost his reputation for nerve, if his allies could have read his emotions at that moment.

The strange, rotting odor of the swamps were charged with death. Their sickly smell seemed to take the heart out of him; the slow heave and fall of the boat turned his stomach, as if with seasickness. If he could have backed out of the enterprise at that moment he might have done it.

But there was no backing out possible now. He had to keep on, and rowed ahead, looking for the harbor entrance. He found it at last, some distance to the westward—a dark opening like an avenue cut into the black, swampy thickets, reaching indefinitely far inland. He braced his nerve to row toward it, and his boat slid into the entrance, facing the most frightful danger of the whole hazard.

The channel was mined; all their information agreed as to that. But as the channel was barely wide enough for a small vessel to pass through, it was unlikely that the mines would be anywhere but down the center.

Fairfax shipped the oars and began to scull ahead, slowly and fearfully. He kept as close to the left shore as he could navigate. It was not at all likely that torpedoes would have been placed there, but his scalp fairly crawled upon his head with the nervous strain, and every time the keel grated on a snag or scraped a sunken log his heart leaped and stopped dead for a second. It was small consolation to reflect that if he should really strike a mine he would not have time to be afraid of it.

The harbor was an artificial channel, which Burke must have dredged with immense labor through the swampy jungle. It was not deep. His oar occasionally touched the oozy bottom, and the slimy roots and trunks of the diseased-looking trees rose high above him, twisted like serpents, foul-smelling, impenetrable, fever-stricken—a natural fortification on which Burke did well to rely.

But he saw more light a little way ahead, and presently he made out something rising high in the air that was like a tree, and yet was not one.

It proved to be a small schooner laid up at the end of the channel, with all her canvas furled or stowed away, and, to

Fairfax's unspeakable relief, he saw that he was at the end of his voyage.

The ship's bowsprit projected over a flat platform. It was a log wharf, that seemed to be surrounded, on the landward side, by a high wall or palisade. In half a dozen oar-strokes his boat thumped against it. The first danger was over.

His plan had been to hide somewhere till daybreak, and then to walk boldly up to the house. It was essential that he should meet the enemy in a strong light, so that his unmatched eyes should be at once recognized.

But he had scarcely clambered ashore when he saw that he would have difficulty in getting any further. A high log wall fenced in the wharf. A gate made of heavy wooden bars was fastened with heavy chains and padlocks.

However, he thought that he might climb over this gate, and he was advancing to examine it closely in the gloom, when a voice hailing him in Spanish brought him up short. The explosion of a hundred-ton gun would have startled him less.

"*Quien va?*" the voice challenged menacingly.

"*Amigo,*" Fairfax answered, cursing his luck at being caught in the dark, where his eyes would count for nothing. Death suddenly swelled vast and black before him.

But, as if his wish had been answered, the place was suddenly flooded with a blaze of bluish-white light that almost blinded him. The logs, the swamps, the schooner leaped out into vivid black and white. An electric arc had been turned on; it hung spluttering over the gateway, and with dazzled eyes Fairfax saw a man open the gate and come through to meet him.

The islander was all in fresh white duck, and under his Panama hat he showed a browned, handsome face, lean and alert, with a carefully trimmed dark beard and mustache. He had a revolver belted at his waist, but his hands were empty.

"Who is that?" he cried sharply, still in Spanish.

The fact flashed upon Fairfax's mind that this could not be old Burke. Neither was it the figure of a Mexican farmer. It could only be the Cuban doctor he had heard of, who had become so important upon the island. Fairfax summoned his courage and coolness for the test.

"You must be Dr. Valga?" he remarked with forced calm.

"Yes. But who are you? Do you know that this is a Mexican military post, and that no one can land here without an order? Have you a pass from the governor?"

"No, I haven't. But it's a strange thing if I can't land on Medilla Island. Who has a better right here than I?" said Fairfax, achieving a smile. And he took off his hat and turned his face full to the electric blaze.

Dr. Valga had never seen Charles Burke, but it was almost certain that he had heard of his chief peculiarities of appearance. He started a pace nearer, stopped short, and his brown face seemed actually to turn sallow.

"*Demonios!*" he muttered shakily, put his hand to his pistol and took it away again, still staring. Then he seemed to pull himself together, walked straight up to the adventurer, and peered into his face.

Fairfax was certain that the man had guessed, or that he knew. He was certain that he saw recognition in that bearded face so close to his own. And he was sure, too, that he saw fear there, and anger. Then suddenly the man's attitude changed.

"I don't know who you are, nor how you got here," he said roughly. "But you must get off the island. Into your boat if you came in one, or I'll throw you into the harbor."

"Hardly. I've come home to stay, this time," quoth Fairfax.

The words were hardly off his tongue when he saw a glitter of steel, and a tremendous blow struck him in the body—at the point, luckily, where he wore the belt. The layer of gold disks stopped the knife-point, but the shock sent him reeling back almost to the water.

The knife dropped to the ground. But before Fairfax could recover himself, the Cuban was upon him again with tigerlike agility, clutching him by the throat, trying to force him into the water.

Fairfax wrestled hard, but the man's hands were like steel on his windpipe, choking the strength out of him. His head swam, and sparks flashed before his eyes. In another moment he felt that he would be forced back into the black water almost beneath him.

With a last, prodigious effort he tore at the hands on his throat. The deadly grip loosened; he managed to let out a smothered yell, and he heard an instant response from somewhere beyond the gate.

Three or four men came suddenly into view from the darkness. The Cuban hissed a venomous curse into his ear, dropped his hold, whipped out his revolver, and aimed a blow with the heavy butt at Fairfax's head.

The Carolinian half evaded it. It glanced, staggering him.

"Juan! Manuel! Pedro!" he shrieked. "Help! It's Don Carlos!"

"*Malediction!*" Valga muttered, and another furious blow swung, and got home this time. The electric light seemed to explode into lightning flashes before Fairfax's eyes. And then darkness.

CHAPTER X.

KATHLEEN.

FAIRFAX had a confused notion that some one had pulled his eyelids up, as if to peep into his eyes—a painful operation, which much irritated him. As his senses drifted back to him, a chatter of rapid voices speaking Spanish sounded in his ears, though they seemed muffled by the pounding ache that throbbed in his head.

Dreamily he realized that he was still alive, and indistinctly his position shaped itself to him, as he felt the glare of the arc light on his closed eyelids, and smelled the poisonous odor of the swamp.

"It's impossible—what you think, Manuel. The best thing is to throw him overboard," said a voice which he recognized as belonging to Dr. Valga.

"But I am almost sure, Don Felipe. You have never seen the *señorita*. Besides, I heard him call out that he was Don Carlos."

"I heard nothing of the sort," Valga grumbled.

"The governor will look after the case. Let us carry him to the house," said a third Mexican voice.

Fairfax would have seized this moment to speak in his own cause, but, to his horror, he found that he could not recollect a single word of Spanish. He understood what the men were saying, but he could not put a single phrase together for himself. The blow he had received had knocked it clear out of his head.

Under these circumstances, the only thing was to feign continued unconsciousness, and he kept his eyes closed while the discussion went on around him. Dr. Valga finally had to give in, and Fairfax felt himself gently picked up and carried away.

The painful glare of the electric light faded from his eyes. The heavy smell of the coast passed away, and he seemed to breathe a purer air. Now and again he ventured to open his eyes just a little, and he saw that he was being borne along a road that seemed to lead slopingly upward. No doubt, he was being taken to the house on the hilltop, and it occurred to him that he could enter it in no better fashion than in a state of supposed insensibility.

So he kept his eyes tight shut, and did not venture even to peep when the bare feet of his bearers shuffled on a paved surface. He heard a door click and squeak as it opened. Lights flashed again through his eyelids. He smelled a faint, heavy odor of flowers, and heard the drip of water.

A suppressed excitement and flurry seemed to attend his arrival. All around him he heard the patter of feet, the sibilant rattle of Mexican voices, the thick tones of negroes. He was carried up a stairway, along a passage; and then, among the murmur and whisper of voices, he heard a woman's tone, sweet and musical. She was speaking with Dr. Valga at a little distance, but he could not distinguish what she said.

He felt himself passed through another door, and presently he was deposited gently upon a bed. So far, he had come through it with great luck, he thought, and he continued to simulate a dead stupor, feeling in no condition to play any other part that night.

There was a subdued sound of continual coming and going by his bedside. He heard the woman's soft voice again; he heard Dr. Valga speaking; but after a little time the talking ceased, and the room grew dark.

He ventured now to open his eyes a little, and saw that he was in a very large room, unlighted except for a small candle that burned dimly at the other extremity. A great window showed a square of starry sky, crossed by perpendicular iron bars, and he made out some one sitting beside it; but whether man or woman he could not tell.

He closed his eyes again, dizzied with even this slight effort. It was no trouble to feign unconsciousness, after all, for he was barely in command of his senses.

All he wanted just then was to be let alone, to recuperate his strength for the cru-

cial test that he would surely have to face on the morrow. And as he lay motionless his pretense passed into reality, and he slept.

He awoke with a frightened start, and found the daylight streaming into his face. For an instant his head whirled; and then, like a douche of cold water, the imminence of his danger rushed upon him. He was in the nest of the Vulture at last, and within reach of the talons.

But at that moment there was nothing but peace. The room was a wide and lofty one, with its few articles of furniture scarcely showing in the emptiness. The floor was tiled; the walls were bare, and the single great window, unglazed, gave him only a glimpse of dazzling sky through its bars.

But beside the window, with her back toward him, sat a woman in a rocking-chair, busy with some delicate needlework in her lap. A woman—or rather a girl, it seemed, for her lustrous dark hair hung in a great braid on her shoulders, and he could just see the curve of a rounded and delicately rosy cheek.

Fairfax looked at her back in silent perturbation. This might be a servant—but the white linen frock seemed too dainty for a menial, and, besides, she was not barefooted; he could see her white canvas shoes. Possibly this was the girl he was to claim as a sister. He racked his brain for her name. Kathleen, was it?

His knowledge of Spanish had come back with repose, and he felt almost himself again, though his head was sore and swollen. Near his head he noticed the usual porous earthen jar for keeping drinking water cool in the tropics, and he realized that he was scorching with thirst. He reached for the jar; it slipped and rattled, and at the sound the girl looked round, sprang up, and ran to the bedside.

For an instant she stood beside him, staring, with parted lips, as if wildly shy. And Fairfax stared back from his pillow, as astonished and as speechless.

At that moment he received only the amazing general impression of her beauty—the delicately slender form, the rounded oval of her face, warmly brown with southern sun and wind; the great, dark-blue Irish eyes, and the parted lips like a wide-open rose—but this glimpse sent a shock to his heart that made him gasp. He had somehow fancied that Burke's daughter was still only a child, but this girl was quite eighteen. Was it really Kathleen? He would have to risk it; he must show that he knew her.

"Kathleen! *Querida hermana mia!*" he murmured.

As if she had been waiting for it, she flung herself upon his shoulder with a little cry of delight, and her arms were round his neck, and her lips were upon his face. And Fairfax found no difficulty in returning her kisses with equal fervor.

"Ah, Carlos! Ah, *Carlitos mio!*" she cooed in his ear. "I didn't know you at first. I hardly remembered how you looked, but I felt that it must be you. I've so wanted you to come back. You've changed, haven't you? But I knew your eyes. I couldn't mistake your eyes, could I? I've been sitting here since daylight, waiting for you to open them, and hoping and hoping that it hadn't all been a mistake. For I really did want you back so badly, Carlitos."

Fairfax recognized the voice that had caught his ears the night before. The girl's frank delight warmed his heart, and smote it with compunction. He almost wished that he was the real Charles Burke—but he had to play the part on which his life hung now.

"I've often wanted to see you, too, Kathie"—he wondered if that was Burke's pet name for his sister. "Are you really so glad to see me? I wish I had come back sooner, but—"

The girl followed his lead now in speaking English.

"I know. You were afraid of what father might do. He was terribly angry when you left him. He hasn't ever mentioned your name since, but I know he'll be glad that you've come back. They didn't tell him last night; but he'll want to see you the first thing this morning, and you mustn't mind if he's harsh, will you?"

"I think I can stand harshness—if it's no more than that," said the interloper.

"What else would it be? Poor papa! You can't imagine how old and worn he's grown in the last few years. I'm sure it's been because you left him. And he can't read now; he can hardly see anything."

"I'm sorry," said Fairfax. "Well, I might as well get up and see him at once," he added, feeling that he wanted to get the worse over. Life or death hung on the coming interview; but, somehow, he was already sickened of the deception which was the only thing that could save him.

He was fully dressed, and he rolled off the bed, sat up, and drank a cup of water to steady his uncertain head.

"But you must have your breakfast!" Kathleen exclaimed. She clapped her hands vigorously, then ran impatiently to the door and called.

In a few moments a fat negress appeared, barefooted, bare-armed, bare-bosomed, clad for the rest in loud calicoes, with a silver tray that held a huge, frothed cup of hot chocolate, a plate of rolls and a heap of delicious golden fruit, oranges, bananas, and mangoes.

Fairfax sipped the chocolate, and tried to nibble the delicious fruit which the girl urged on him with pretty, caressing insistency, but he felt that he could not eat. He fancied with what horror Kathleen would turn from him if she could know what he really was. He was not hardened enough in deception for his part. He had come prepared to play a game of bluff against men, but this was something different—this was something shameful!

Possessed by his dark thoughts, he grew silent and incapable of replying to the girl's chatter. The situation was unbearable, and it was a relief when some one tapped gently at the door. Dr. Felipe Valga peeped in, then entered, smiling amiably and holding out his hand.

"Welcome home, Mr. Charles!" he said, in cordial, perfect English. "And forgive the rough reception I gave you last night. I had never seen you, you know. You were the first stranger who had landed here for years, and naturally I couldn't dream that it could be with any honest purpose."

But instantly upon Fairfax's memory flashed the picture of the man's face as he had seen it in the electric light—furious, alarmed, surmising. He was sure that the man had recognized him, and had tried to murder him in spite of it, until the coming of the men had checked him. There was more mystery in this than he could fathom; but it was his business just then to let things pass as smoothly as they would, and he accepted the offered hand frankly.

"My head still sings with your pistol-butt," he observed. "But I'm thankful, at any rate, that you didn't use the other end of the gun."

"Thank the saints I didn't," agreed the Cuban heartily. He continued to peer searchingly, shrewdly, though with a smile, into Fairfax's face.

"You've fallen into good hands at once," he continued. "Are you sure, Miss Kathleen, that you've got the right man?"

Kathleen looked momentarily startled, and then indignant.

"As if I couldn't be sure of my own brother!" she flashed, and Dr. Valga smiled again.

"To be sure," he said. "Well, my principal errand is to tell your brother that his father would like to see him as soon as he can find it convenient to come to his room."

"He knows that I'm here, then? How is he?" inquired Fairfax with deep interest.

"Well, you'll find him failed greatly, I fear. We didn't tell him of your arrival till this morning. His condition is such that any shock might have very serious results, so that, I trust, you'll be careful not to excite him, nor to stay with him too long."

"I'll go with you, Carlos," said Kathleen, squeezing his arm to encourage him for the ordeal.

"His father wants to see him alone, my *señorita,*" said Valga. "Even I am not going. The governor is in his office. Mr. Charles will remember the way."

Was this a trap? At any rate, Fairfax felt himself caught in the jaws of it. He had not the slightest idea how to find his way to the governor's office.

He stood up, and an inspiration led him to stagger a little and to put his hand to his head.

"I'm afraid I can't go alone, after all," he said. "Kathleen will have to steady me with her arm as far as the door."

"Pray let me help you," Valga cried.

"Thanks. Kathleen is quite enough," Fairfax returned, and he leaned ostentatiously on the girl's frail shoulder as she piloted him out of the room and upon a brick-floored gallery that surrounded a great open space in the center of the house.

At a glance Fairfax saw that Burke's castle was built upon the usual lines of Mexican-Spanish architecture. It was a huge, square brick building, with a square *patio* in the center—a paved courtyard open at the top. A small fountain splashed in the center of the court, amid a mass of flowers, and a great stairway rose from the rear of the *patio* to the gallery where he was standing.

Fairfax tried to engage the girl in such animated conversation that his ignorance of the way might pass for mere inattention. She piloted him along the gallery, past many

closed doors, around to the opposite side of the court, and finally stopped.

"You must go in alone," she whispered, pointing to the closed door in front of them.

"Yes—and wait, Kathleen. Where shall I find you when I come out?"

"I'll be on the watch for you. And you won't lose your temper, will you, Carlitos, no matter what he says? Remember he is old and ill."

"I'll be as mild as milk," Fairfax promised, looked once more into the girl's flushed face, and boldly pushed open the door without knocking.

The room he entered was dim, for wooden shutters closed it from the sunlight. It was almost as large as his own chamber, and he had a glimpse of some office furniture, a roll-top desk, an American safe against the wall.

But he gave no attention to these things, for in a wide basket-chair sat an old and white-bearded man, with his back to the window. He wore blue spectacles, and he had half risen at the opening of the door.

"Is that you, Valga?" he said in a tremulous but still deep and powerful voice. "Have you brought Charles with you?"

For the life of him, Fairfax could not reply. The words he meant to say stuck in his throat. He gazed at the old man, who stared straight toward him, but evidently without being able to see him clearly.

He had aged and whitened so much that Fairfax would have had difficulty in recognizing the Vulture from the photograph he had seen in New York. The cheeks were hollow and flaccid, the grim lines of the face were masked by a great beard that fell, venerably white, upon his breast, and the blue spectacles hid the wolfish eyes. But this was truly the municipal outlaw, though his whole body was shrunken and fallen in, and the huge, thin hand trembled on the arm of the chair.

"That isn't Valga," he said, after a concentrated gaze. "Is that — is it you, Charles?"

"Y-yes," Fairfax managed to stammer.

"Come here, boy," said Burke, and Fairfax moved slowly up to the chair to face the stare of the blue spectacles. Dr. Valga's words recurred to him, that any shock might be dangerous, and he half expected to see the old man falling into a fit of rage, sinking back suddenly, paling, dying. But he showed no such emotion. Not a muscle in his face seemed to quiver.

"Why did you go away, Charles? Why didn't you send me word?"

"You wouldn't hear of my going," Fairfax collected himself to say. "There was no way to send you word. Besides, I didn't think you'd want to hear from me. I'm sorry, but here I am now, at any rate."

"Where have you been?"

"In Mexico—in the United States."

The old man was silent a moment, as if pondering some other question. Then he extended his hand.

"Come here—closer."

Fairfax moved up, and, still impressed by the man's legendary ferocity, he half expected a clutch on his throat. But Burke simply touched his hair, and passed a hand lightly over his face, with the inquiring touch of the blind.

"Thank God!" he said gently with a sigh. "Thank God that you've come back, my son. For you're sore needed here."

(To be continued.)

VIOLETS.

WELCOME, maids of honor!
You do bring
In the spring
And wait upon her.

She has virgins many
Fresh and faire;
Yet you are
More sweet than any.

Y' are the maiden posies,
And so grac't,
To be plac't
'Fore damask roses.

Robert Herrick.

His Atonement

By Paul Crissey

FOURTEEN years before—all his life until fourteen years before—he had been Alfred Doakes; then, of a sudden, he had become No. 38. The long years between had served as a narcotic through which identity, character, and personality had been forgotten. So long had No. 38 been in that penitentiary by the broad river that he himself had almost forgotten who he used to be. Thoughts of the outside world had long since ceased to occupy his mind; the fitfully recurring memory of that epochal day on which the gray-haired judge pronounced his sentence had become but a blurred, fragmentary incident in a vague, disordered, and unenviable past.

Even his own guilt or innocence No. 38 had never quite been sure of. The episode, of which he had so little recollection, was like a suddenly ignited heap of powder—a puff of white smoke, and scorching flame and scar, which, in the years since, had distorted his soul and seared his mind with the results of its explosive remorse.

But, slowly, ploddingly, he had, as always before, accepted the inevitable, succumbing with surly acquiescence to all that is implied in the rough, striped suit of a "lifer." As such the other convicts knew him; as such they treated him. To them he was as surely a fixture as any of the sentry boxes along the high wall of the prison yard. They would always be there—and so would No. 38.

In the first few years inside the walls he had struggled with desperate hope to keep his thoughts apace with the world outside, to hold at heart the memory of his free life. Daily papers and occasional letters from friends had served to fend the prison haze from his mind. Suddenly its heavy pallor shut down upon his soul, and it was then that he realized with a sickening, falling sensation how hopeless had been the effort.

Thereafter, in soul as well as in body, he was in the ranks with the others. His eyes seldom left the ground; his feet moved in that shuffling, methodical tread—the prison step—and even his thoughts preferred to take the narrowing road which captivity leaves open for those to whom life and freedom is closed.

Never in the history of his imprisonment had he caused trouble. In reality he had died when the verdict was read against him, though his muscles moved, his flesh grew, and his mind worked in a vague, unreasoning way. As in everything in his life before, he had accepted the inevitable—had deliberately killed himself in order to serve his time with as little pain and anxiety to himself as possible.

As soon as they were assured of his acceptance of fate, the prison authorities offered him inducements to become a trusty. Dully he refused them all—it required thought, and thought disturbed him.

The only other lifer during No. 38's

first year in the prison, and its gardener suddenly ended his sentence as had been stipulated, by death. Almost mechanically Alfred Doakes, Convict No. 38, moved into the dead man's place, and, strangely enough, found a solace in the work of giving flowers to visitors and to Warden Murphy's family when they called on Sundays.

The tiny greenhouse and the flower-beds became his daytime world, after fourteen years of stones and iron bars. Every day he ran his fingers lovingly through the soft black loam of the hothouse; every night, as he watched the staring white light of the big arc lamp peep through the latticed door of his cell, he longed and lived for the next day and its hot, earthy smells. Dimly, dully ambition was stirring within him. Like many another before him, in contact with mother earth lay possibilities of resurrection.

He had been given the run of the yard; yet never once did the thought of escape enter his mind. He had been told, authoritatively, that he owed his freedom in repayment for the debt incurred by a wicked act. Stolidly he clung to that idea, neither wailing nor dreaming—merely to live each minute as it came without perplexity over the last or wonderment for the next.

One Saturday afternoon early in the April of his fifteenth year in the prison he suddenly raised his head from the place on his breast, and snuffed at the breeze. There was a strangeness in it.

Far down the river, the city — black, noisy, businesslike, the landing-board of a beehive—roared its steady song. No. 38 dropped his eyes again. It was that world over there in the smoke and tumult that had cast him out. He felt no bitterness, only a sense of not being wanted, a sense which deprived him of any longing to return to it.

He cut his spade deep in the sand of the beach, impulsively stopped, and raised his eyes once more. He was at the lower end of the great wall, alone except for a guard idly smoking his pipe, his rifle leaning against the wall of his house. No. 38 had asked special permission to hunt soil outside the prison walls. The spade, sunk in the sand, there remained untouched while No. 38, with a new vigor, a new thought, gazed, mystified, at the novel aspect of the world about him. For the first time he felt keenly the loss of his freedom.

Closely, almost furtively, he watched the guard. His eyes slowly shifted to the river behind the sentry-box. At first the convict could hardly believe his senses—for there, moored to a stake, lay a boat, a rowboat, flat-bottomed, with its oars tucked handily under the thwarts. For a fleeting moment the muscles under the coarse clothes tightened impulsively. The boat, itself a violation of the rules by a self-indulged guard, offered the lifer an awakening tonic—and the stimulus burned fiercely in his blood.

Scarcely two minutes had passed when the air was torn by three shrieks from a steamer's siren as a great river-boat floated by, crosswise of the current, loaded to the bulwarks with a crowd of nondescript passengers. The head of No. 38 jerked forward and his deep-set eyes started, crablike, from their sockets. A great burst of flame roared up from one of the posts, and a thousand voices screamed with despair as the passengers rushed madly to the other side of the steamer. The swift current swung the boat broadside of the stream and a swifter eddy whirled it about again.

The name on the stern spelled reviving memories for the lifer. Strangely enough, the boat was The Aberdeen; No. 38 knew it from stem to stern. Out of the misty past his mind groped for details until in a vivid flash he saw the struggle that had taken place upon her decks fourteen years before—the brief tragedy in which he had played one—and that the losing—of the principal parts.

Vividly the man within No. 38 awakened. The spade was flung aside. The bowed shoulders straightened. Vaguely, almost unknowingly, the convict saw his chance.

"Warn the office!" he cried, and sprang past the sentry-box. The sleepy guard aroused himself, gave one look at him, followed the convict's gaze toward the burning steamer, and fled madly up the beach toward the captain of the guard's office.

No. 38 chuckled. He knew the fellow would lose his head. With one swift glance back, to make sure that he was alone, the lifer loosed the painter of the boat.

In a moment the swirling river, as rigid as a mill-race, was hurling him after the burning ship. He drew the oars from under the thwarts, stripped off his prison coat and threw it overboard. All the muscles in his body suddenly sprang into motion, and his breath came sharply between clenched teeth.

Slowly but surely he gained upon the steamer. Like a crippled bird the burning hulk held one moment and surged ahead the next, drifting on, scattering embers and burning brands upon the water.

Far down the stream Convict No. 38, the murderer, could see the pall of smoke that hung above the city that had exiled him. He smiled at it and strained upon the oars. But his thoughts were upon the doomed boat.

"They'll never think of that one good raft above the stern," he muttered, and as he knew every inch of the old boat upon which he had once been mate, he thought still further of other things which might be forgotten.

The burning steamer had stopped. A gigantic eddy had caught it in an embrace and slowly it pivoted pyrotechnically. The convict in the skiff saw the crowded upper decks, saw the wild, haggard faces looking shoreward, while the huge siren shrieked its agonizing call for help.

Instinctively No. 38 knew that small boats, tugs, and launches were putting out from the docks along the shore. With new determination he forced the nose of the skiff into the big eddy. One more stroke brought him against the burning hull. He drew a deep breath, a heavy sigh, partly for the new life coursing in his veins and partly for the wo of what he saw.

From the decks had come a rain of human beings. In a flood, bodies were dropping into the water as the flames licked hungrily at the places which they had occupied the instant before. No. 38 saw five men high up on the mast suddenly crumple as a long, loan finger of flame pointed up at them. Their bodies splashed on the water, bubbled for a moment, and sank.

Close under the hot stern of the big boat No. 38 pulled his skiff and watched. All hope of getting aboard had left his mind. He knew, clearly, now, that his place was there, that his duty could be better done where he was.

Hungry flames in search of more food licked down over the rail of the stern and breathed feverishly into No. 38's face. The air was filled with burning brands that hissed like snakes when they plunged into the river. White smoke rolled skyward, and in the bowels of the steamer queer thunderings, marking preliminary explosions, were taking place.

Something splashed into the water close beside him. No. 38 pulled it carefully into the boat and knelt to look at it. A woman! He could have spent hours gazing upon the face which lay before him, horror-stricken though it was. But there was other work to do.

With muscles tensed he waited for the current to bring others to him, hardly daring to get them for fear that he already had too many for his little boat.

Almost insanely he worked, clutching at water-soaked hands and hair, and finally, when the water had crept too close to the gunwales for safety, the lifer pushed off from the steamer.

A scorching flame followed him, and the woman in the bottom of the boat stirred restlessly and cried out in prayer. He saw her eyes flash upon his dress, saw with a quick, sullen rage that she knew he was a convict, and that, in spite of his having saved her life, she was afraid of him.

But that was all! A terrific dull explosion shook the air, and a shower of embers hissed down upon the skiff. Frantically the convict fought them, hurling them from him into the river with his bare hands. The clothing of the unconscious woman was on fire. A child sobbed softly to herself in the bottom of the skiff. Raging, the lifer threw himself upon them and thrashed and patted the brands into blackness. He took fire himself. A million searing flames were eating at him. In anguish he rolled on the bottom of the boat, then lay quiet, his eyes fixed upon the blackened remains of the deathdealing steamer turning slowly in the big eddy. The small boat drifted on down the stream. A sudden thought seized the convict, and he slowly, painfully turned his head. Four lives, living, breathing creatures he had snatched from hell.

Atonement! Expiation! He had taken one life in a day years ago. With clear deliberateness he had saved four. Four lives for one—and fourteen years of his own life. He had served his time.

But a strange peace was coming to him. His own body lay motionless in the boat and his eyes were dulled. A hot flame licked at his face, but it did not seem to burn. Pain was gone. Dimly he knew the little skiff itself was burning, and a great horror lay over that world which had cast him off.

A moment of blackness; from afar he

heard voices — then blackness again, and off across the river in a sweep of the powerful eddy there slowly sank a blackened, burning hull, devoid of the lives which had filled it.

But lifer No. 38, with a new world before him, was past knowledge of what he had done. He had swooned.

II.

At first it seemed to the man as if he were deep in a pit of thick, pasty something. Vainly he tried to raise his chin above the suffocating mass. Failing, he allowed the whole bulk to sink. As he felt the depressing weight rush by him on all sides, he suddenly dropped through it and fell upon a bed, cool and soft. Slowly, unbelievingly, he opened his eyes and dimly looked about. For a moment his thoughts worked in confusion. A moment later, quite easily, he knew that he was in a hospital. The chain of thought carried him back to the terrible happenings he had just gone through. A question arose to his lips; they opened thickly to ask it. Only a sigh escaped. The sound aroused somebody at his bedside, and the next moment a white-capped nurse and a young man bent over him.

But No. 38 saw the answer to his question. The nurse was not a prison nurse.

"Do you want anything?" she asked, and the young man leaned eagerly forward.

"No," answered the convict. A moment after he changed his mind. "How did it all come out—yesterday?" he asked.

"Yesterday!" the young man cried. "Why, that was three weeks ago!"

No. 38 started. Three weeks! The prison authorities must have been searching for him. But the nurse was talking.

"This man is Mr. Angus," she said. "He is a newspaper man. He wants you to tell him all about what you've done, and give him your name."

No. 38 turned slowly with his bandages and faced her from his pillow.

"Don't you know my name?" he asked, a new idea springing into his mind.

"No; we had no identification of you at all. The tug which picked up your skiff got there just before it sank."

"But my clothes—"

"Were all burned off," the nurse finished gently.

Almost stupidly No. 38 received this news. He bethought himself of his closely cropped hair. That would have told the whole story. Weakly he raised his hand, but felt only a mass of bandages.

"Was my hair burned?" he asked, as if incredulous.

"There wasn't a spear of hair on your head," returned the nurse emphatically. She added: "You are quite a hero, but we don't know who you are. One of the women you saved thought she knew you by sight, but she wouldn't say who she thought you were. She did not know your name."

"Has no one asked for me?" he asked eventually.

"No one," answered Angus, the reporter. "I've been with you for several days. You haven't said a word or dropped a single clue. I want your story, and want it badly. May I have it?"

Convict No. 38 was puzzled. A new problem faced him. He was dead to the prison, evidently, and his identity had been destroyed by the fire. A dozen reasons why the authorities had not searched for him flashed through his mind. For the first time in fourteen years the gates to freedom stood open; for the first time in all these years he had buried his convict personality and stood as an actuality to be acknowledged by the outside world. Swiftly his mind floated over the prospect. What might not the future have in store for him? He dared not conceive, for it was a new world and a new city he was in.

Vaguely he heard the insistent, persuasive voice of the reporter urging him to disclose his identity and with it the whole brave truth of his adventure. But the voice sounded far away, and a nearer, louder, and more insistent tone from somewhere within him was anguish with his quickened mentalities.

"You have paid your penalty," the voice within urged. "Fourteen years of your life you have given to take the place of the miserable life you took! Four other lives you have returned to the world. Your boat is destroyed. Your prison-clipped hair is scorched away. Your stripes have been taken off you by fate. Your identity has been burned, and you have paid for your mistake. The world lies before you—enter it."

The lifer had almost begun to believe, when again, as from far away, came the voice of the reporter.

"Let the public judge how much of a

hero you are. Give me the story and I'll make you famous."

But one word in the reporter's desperate inducement stuck in the mind of No. 38, and that one word shadowed the dream and stilled the voice within.

"Judge!" he repeated in a whisper.

They had judged him once. As for his atonement, as for his right to freedom, they would again be the judges. Dumbly he fell back into the narrow channel of thought—yet he had strength enough to motion the reporter to his side.

"Wait—until I get out of here. You—shall—have the story."

And again the murkiness surrounded him. For four days it continued to shut the light from his thought.

Persistently Angus visited the hospital, waiting for the story he felt sure was forthcoming. After three days No. 38 was able to leave his bed.

"Glad to see you up and about," continued the reporter, "for time and waiting ruins patience. Now for the story."

"Does it mean much to you?" asked the lifer dully. He had fought a silent fight with himself. He had stilled that urging voice within him.

"My job—and food!" promptly reported the young man. "That's about all there is in life."

The convict looked up sharply. "Not all—quite," he muttered. Yet not a word about himself would the lifer say, as the two hurried across the city.

"Can't you tell me part of it now?" asked Angus once impatiently, for he had been days on the assignment. The convict stopped abruptly, and for the first time since his committance it was Alfred Doakes who spoke.

"Say!" he growled, "if you're after big game, shut up. If you're not, then you'd better say so." He was surprised at his own voice, yet not more astonished was he at the idea of voluntarily going back to prison for life!

No. 38 paid scant attention to the regions he was traversing, yet when they reached the depot at last he readily stepped aboard the right train.

The reporter, now confident he was in on a big story, kept wisely silent. Five minutes later convict No. 38, with shuffling feet and the old prison subservience, stood before the warden ready to continue his life sentence.

Angus, pencil in hand, was groping wildly for details. And he got them. Warden Murphy looked up.

"Back again, Doakes?"

"Yes, sir," muttered No. 38.

The warden's clever eyes flashed over the scars on No. 38's face.

"Fight it out with yourself?" he asked knowingly.

"Yes, sir."

"Ready to go on?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tried to skip?"

"No, sir." The answer, though different, was in the same monotonous tone.

"Why did you come back?" asked the warden.

No. 38 shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know," he answered slowly.

But No. 38 was silent as he stood waiting. The warden fumbled among his papers for a minute, bit his lip for a second, and when he turned again to the crestfallen figure of No. 38 there was a strange glitter in his eye.

"Why did you go—out there—in the fire?" he asked. The words seemed to be wrung from him.

Again No. 38 shrugged his shoulders, and just a tinge of red crept into his cheeks. It was good to be able to glory in pride even if it had to be done alone.

"I couldn't help it," he answered finally. "I didn't think."

The warden had risen to his feet.

"Doakes," he said sharply, "I'm glad that you didn't think for once. You went into that hell—out there—my wife was there—she recognized you—you had her in your boat when it sank." He stopped suddenly, and even the reporter's pencil ceased. "Remember the woman and the little girl you picked the tulips for a while ago? The woman was my wife and the little girl is mine. I—I lost the girl—but I have my wife."

The heavy breathing of No. 38 dully trying to organize his thoughts was the only sound in the room. The warden laid a paper in his hand. The seal of the State was stamped upon the stiff paper.

"I've obtained your pardon, Doakes," the warden said slowly. "It may cost me my job in the end, but it's for you—a little return because — once you didn't think."

Slowly Doakes turned his head. Now the whirling, noisy city across the river was

calling him, offering him opportunities that he was free to take. A moment his hand rested tightly in that of the warden, and then he went out, for the train and freedom. The eyes of the warden sparkled.

"He'll be a man now!" he whispered to himself. "And his time is served."

Angus started to leave.

"George!" he cried, "this is a bully story! I must hurry back to the office."

But the warden, with a strong hand, stayed him.

"It's a big story," he agreed simply, "but it's too big to print. The man with time served will stand a better show out there if it isn't known."

"But it means my reputation," gasped the reporter.

"And his, too! Remember that he is starting life anew," insisted the warden. But as he looked at the boyish figure beside him he relented.

"Turn your story in to the city editor," he said, "and I'll stop it before it gets any further."

For a moment the warden watched the fleeing figure down the prison walk. Then his eyes lighted on the tall figure in the lead. Head up, eyes bright with possibilities, Alfred Doakes was hurrying to that world which lay before him; behind him lay time served—and atonement.

A WIDE-AWAKE SLEEPER

by Arnold Hofman

I AM a sober, industrious, law-abiding American citizen who leads an honest, upright life and has a place in his heart for all human beings, including hogs, cows, elephants, jackasses, and lobsters.

I always stand up and take my hat off whenever a band or hand-organ strikes up "The Star-Spangled Banner," and I can sing that song clear through without having to supply "tra-la-la" for a single word. I never fail to give up my seat in the street-car to a woman (if she is young and good-looking, or if I happen to know the lady or the person she is with), and I always applaud and cheer when I hear the tune of "Yankee Doodle," whether it is in a café or at a funeral.

All these virtues I possess; but besides being an artist, I have one other great fault, or eccentricity, or disease, or whatever you wish to term it, viz: I walk in my sleep. This habit, or mannerism, or — well, we shall call it a habit for the present, and argue about it at some future time—this habit, then, has caused me no end of trouble and embarrassment.

But somnambulism also has some advantages. Last summer I decided to spend a month in the country painting landscapes and building up my health. On the recommendation of a friend I selected a quiet

little village which was not advertised as a summer resort. On arriving there I was surprised beyond all expectations, for the scenery was picturesque and the town secluded, its inhabitants quaint country people who adhered to old-fashioned country customs.

I was told that the Widow Cummings had a spare room and would probably take me in as a lodger. The widow, a scrawny, sharp-nosed, thin-lipped woman of about fifty, looked me over critically, and gave me to understand that she had very little use for city gentlemen and especially for artists, as she had had an experience with one artist who was exceedingly absent-minded when it came to money matters, and had left suddenly one night while owing her for six weeks' rent and board.

But I succeeded in partially overcoming her prejudice, and she reluctantly assigned me to a front room with low windows. The windows afforded a splendid view of the surrounding country and I was greatly pleased. While she was still in the room explaining to me about meals, *et cetera,* I went to one of the windows and looked out. "A picturesque old place that," said I, pointing to a large, old-fashioned brick house across the road. It stood well back on a grassy slope and was surrounded by heavy shade trees.

"Yes, that's Judge Wheeler's place," informed my landlady. "He's the wealthiest man in the county, an' a fine old gent, too; but it's little happiness he gets out of life, in spite of his money."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, his son was killed in the Spanish war, and his wife—law, that man thinks the world an' all o' that wife o' his—she's paralyzed, both her lower limbs plumb paralyzed. She ain't walked a step for a year. His only consolation is his daughter, a beautiful girl of nineteen. But he don't see much of her 'cause she's mostly away to school, an' they tell me that this summer she ain't goin' to be here a-tall 'cause the judge is sending her to Europe."

"That's too bad," said I, which was intended to express sympathy for the judge and his wife and at the same time for myself, for I felt that the daughter's going to Europe knocked me out of a possible flirtation with that young lady, and this, for some unaccountable reason, nettled me a trifle at the time.

I made arrangements with the widow to stay a month, but was careful not to tell her of my sleep-walking habit for fear that she might grow suspicious or frightened and refuse to take me as a lodger. During the two weeks that followed I saw the judge several times, but always from a distance, he either being out on the veranda of his house or walking about under the trees. Once I passed him on the street and was deeply impressed by his dignified bearing and his aristocratic but gentle features, whose every line spoke of melancholy.

The man interested me greatly. I began to long for an introduction so that I might, if possible, gain his friendship. He seemed so lonesome, so utterly in need of a companion who was in his own mental sphere. The flickering interest that I had taken in the daughter at the time the Widow Cummings had spoken about her was gone and forgotten. Nothing of this sort attracted me to the judge. It was the charm of his own personality and environment.

The gloomy old house with its melancholy master and unfortunate mistress had a strange fascination for me, and often I would while away an hour in sitting at my window and gazing over at it, while my imagination wove countless pictures and stories around and about the place.

One evening I came home very tired. I had been out since six o'clock that morning, tramping over the hills with my sketch-book. I sat down to the supper-table with the Widow Cummings and her three children and ate rapidly and very copiously, for I was exceedingly hungry. Then, excusing myself from the table before the others had finished, I did not go out on the back porch to smoke as was my usual custom, but went immediately to my room. There I stretched myself out on the bed without stopping to light the lamp or remove any of my clothing.

It was not my intention to go to sleep. I merely wanted to rest while my dinner was digesting. Well, I got to thinking about the judge and one thing or another while watching the full moon whose light was streaming in through the open window. Gradually my thoughts merged into dreams and I fell into a heavy sleep.

How long I remained on the bed I do not know, but I suddenly remembered that the judge had given me an order for a picture and that I had finished the picture, but instead of delivering it, I had framed it and hung it on the wall of my room. That was a most negligent and discourteous thing

to do. The picture must be delivered at once. (What follows I did as one in a dream imagines he does things, only I did them in reality. Yet I remember everything clearly, just as a sleeper often remembers his dreams on awakening.) I went to the wall and took down the picture—in reality, the picture was a colored print of "Custer's Last Fight" framed in an atrocious wooden frame.

I took the picture under my arm and walked out through the window. Outside it was as bright as day. I walked across the road to the stone gate-posts at the entrance to Judge Wheeler's grounds and swung back the gate. Up the gravel path, under the alley of overhanging trees, I went until I came to the veranda. No one awaited me there, but the front door was open and it seemed only natural that I should walk in and find the judge so as to give him his picture.

The judge was not in the hall, so I mounted the broad stairs. Attracted by a light issuing from an open door, I sought out the room and entered. It was evidently the library, for the walls were lined with closely filled book-shelves extending to the ceiling. In a large leather chair lay a scattered newspaper, and on a small stand near-by stood an ash-tray on whose edge rested a smoldering cigar. The judge had evidently just stepped out of the room for a few moments. I glanced into the next room through a wide, open doorway, draped with flimsy silk curtains. There was no light in this room, but the light thrown from the library was sufficient for me to see that the room contained a bed, and that an elderly woman was in the bed, asleep. I turned away hastily to look for the judge elsewhere. In turning, my eyes fell upon the couch in the library—I had not seen this couch before—now it seemed to be half floating on a silver cloud. A young girl—the most beautiful I had ever seen; none of my dream-women had ever been so entrancing—was reclining on the couch, asleep.

One delicately rounded arm rested above her head, the other had slipped from the couch and now hung downward, limp and graceful. I leaned my picture against a chair and stepped closer to the vision. A smile played about the exquisite, slightly parted lips. The lovely face and that smile set my pulses to throbbing with the wildest exultation. I dropped on my knees beside the couch and, seizing the drooping hand, I pressed a kiss full upon those irresistible lips.

The next moment I was brought out of my trance by a loud scream, followed with distracted shrieks for help.

For a moment I was dazed. Then I sprang to my feet and leaped back in the wildest confusion. In doing so, my foot finished "Custer's Last Fight" by going through glass and all and I fell headlong, thereby upsetting the stand with the ash-tray and several other small articles of furniture that stood about.

I knew that it was useless to try to explain matters and there was no time to lose. In a frenzy of humiliation, fear, and despair I scrambled to my feet and bolted out of the door. Jumping down the stairs three at a time I collided with the judge, who was coming up at the same rate of speed, and we went down like a Siamese pinwheel, the judge landing on top when we reached the foot of the stairs.

But the judge was an active man and, without even delaying to catch his breath, promptly sat on me and proceeded to pommel away at my head and chest with astonishing force and rapidity.

With a superhuman effort I finally succeeded in wrenching myself out from under him, and then seizing him by the wrists to prevent further violence, I tried to explain.

"One moment, my dear sir. Let me explain!" I cried excitedly. "It was all a mistake. A terrible, horrible mistake. I meant no harm. I—I—"

By this time the girl had come down and now stood watching us with fluttering nostrils, her bosom rising and falling with sharply drawn breaths, her deep blue eyes dilated with fear and astonishment. I continued my explanation.

"But, my dear sir, you don't understand. I did not know what I was doing. I—"

"Turn loose of me, you rascal," thundered the judge. Then, as the servants rushed in: "Here, James, help me overpower this rascal." This was accomplished easily enough, for James was a powerful sixfooter.

"What did he do to you, Alice?" panted the judge.

"He—he kissed me!" gasped the girl.

"Kissed you, eh?" snarled the judge and, with James holding me, he renewed his fistic maneuvers upon my face and body with all of his former alacrity.

Meanwhile, the maid was out on the

veranda, screaming for help at the top of her voice, and in a few moments the place was surrounded and the hall packed with excited neighbors, armed with brickbats, butcher-knives, meat-cleavers, rolling-pins, and other such trinkets, not to mention the artillery consisting of pitchforks, scythes, and double-bladed axes.

The news of the terrible thing I had done spread about among the country folks like wildfire.

"Lynch him!" "Lynch the dog!" came cries from all sides, and I was jostled out of the hall and pushed from one to other until they got me out under the trees.

The judge had come out on the veranda and stood there prepared to watch the execution, but the girl was making frantic efforts to stop the infuriated mob. At this my heart gave a great bound of joy and gratitude. She looked so beautiful in all her excitement that I longed to kiss her again. What did it matter to me? One more kiss from those lips and then the mob could fall to with their meat-cleavers and pitchforks, or string me to a tree — I wouldn't care. But right here new complications arose. The Widow Cummings arrived upon the scene.

"Let me get to him! Let me get to him!" she cried in her shrill voice that rose high above the din. They made way for her until she reached my side and we stood face to face.

"So here you are, are yer? You robber, you sneak-thief! Owe a poor widow with three children a week's rent and sneak away after dark, will yer? An' yer ain't satisfied with doin' me out of my money, but yer must rob me, too, by takin' my best picture off my wall. That beautiful 'Custer's Last Fight.'"

When the girl heard this she ceased her efforts to quell the riot and turning away in disgust, she joined her father on the veranda, where she was out of ear-shot. My heart sank in despair, but the Widow Cummings continued:

"Oh, I got suspicious when yer didn't come out on the porch to smoke. An' when I didn't see no light nor hear no sound in yer room for about an hour, I knocked on the door, an' when no one answered I walked in, an' then I seen what was the matter. But yer mean, low-down heart wasn't even satisfied with that. Yer had to come over here an' try to rob the judge's house, an'—"

"Be quiet for a moment and listen!" I yelled. And when she ceased her raving for a moment I went on in persuasive tones: "You don't understand, Mrs. Cummings. I was not in my right mind when I did this. I am a somnambulist."

"Fiddlesticks," retorted the widow. "Bein' a somnambulist or a Baptist, or a Methodist, nor nuthin' else, won't excuse yer. I'm a Presbyterian myself, but that don't give me the right to rob poor widows with three children, does it?"

I thought of something else. "But, my dear madam, my trunk is still at your house. Do you think I would leave it there if I intended to rob you?"

"The trunk's locked, an' most likely empty, too, for all I know. You needn't waste time talkin' to me. Go to, men! Lay him out!" she cried with the fervor of a Joan of Arc. And the men obeyed.

Again my execution was deferred. This time by shrill cries issuing from the interior of the house. Cries of:

"Help! Fire! Fire! Help!" All eyes looked up and saw clouds of smoke pouring forth from the second story windows of the judge's house.

I realized with a sinking feeling that when I knocked the stand over the smoldering cigar must have rolled under the curtains that hung between the rooms and set them on fire. And there was that poor, helpless woman, in bed in the midst of the fire and unable to move. Oh! it was horrible! I felt as though I was going mad.

"House on fire! Save Mrs. Wheeler!" cried the people, dropping their hardware and forgetting all about me as they rushed to the rescue. I, too, started for the house, but was jerked back by the town marshal. "They've got plenty hands to help put the fire out," he said methodically. "It's my duty to take yer to jail before yer have a chance to escape durin' the excitement of the fire."

I was too much agitated to remonstrate and I followed him blindly. "They should 'a' lynched yer," said the marshal as he pushed me into a stone cell in the basement of the court-house, "but they didn't, so I can't do nothin' else but arrest yer." Then he turned the key and hurried off to join the rescuers.

I spent the night tortured by the greatest mental anguish and remorse, for I felt that if anything had happened to that poor, helpless woman I would bear the weight of it on my soul for the rest of my days. But with

the first rays of dawn the door to my cell was flung open and the judge stood before me with radiant face and outstretched arms.

"You noble man! You noble man! How will I ever be able to repay you?" he exclaimed.

I understood it all now and groaned aloud. The house had burned to the ground, the judge's wife had perished in the flames, and over this overwhelming disaster the poor man had lost his reason. So I said in a comforting voice, broken with emotion:

"There now, my good man, don't take it so hard! Perhaps it was all for the best after all."

"That's just it! That's just it!" cried the judge. "It *was* all for the best. My wife is healed! She can walk!"

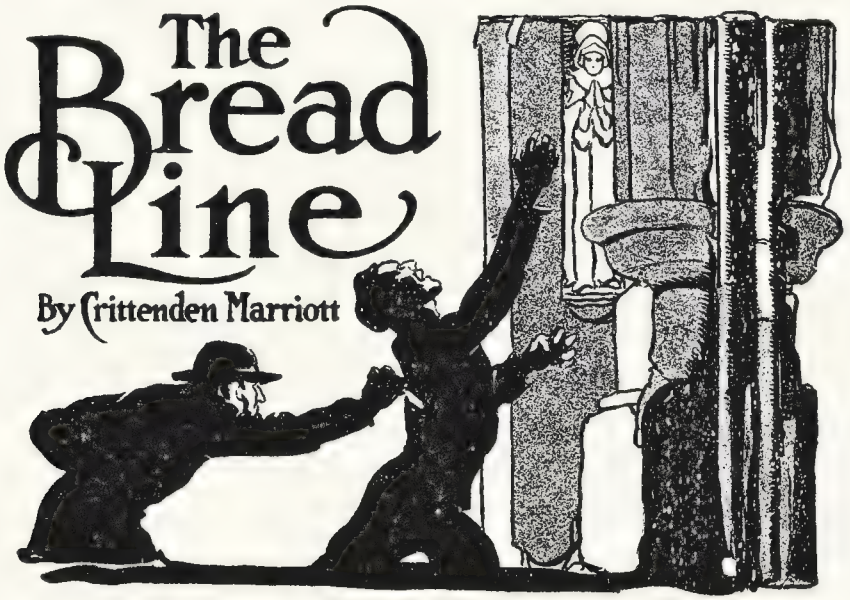
I staggered back a few steps and the judge continued: "When the fire reached her bed and there was no one near to help her, the shock, the excitement, the fear, all combined to bring her up to such a high nervous tension that she regained control of her legs and ran out of the room. The damage to the house is practically nothing, and it doesn't matter. Oh, sir, how can I ever repay you? Your coming was a godsend! Yes, I learned only this morning from the Widow Cummings that you were a somnambulist, and I rushed here immediately to shower my thanks and blessings upon you." Then, after a pause, he added with a smile, "And Miss Alice, my daughter, who is with us for a few days before sailing for Europe, has commissioned me to tell you that she would like to thank you in person, sir."

We all took the trip to Europe together. Now we have returned, and Alice—my wife—is looking over my shoulder as I write this. My mother-in-law, a very dear old lady by the way, has come to us for a short visit, and is at this moment in the next room teaching one of the neighbors how to dance the latest barn-dance.

It is needless to say that the Widow Cummings was amply repaid for her "Custer's Last Fight." Moreover, she has been converted and is now a firm believer in somnambulism.

The Bread Line

By Crittenden Marriott



CHAPTER I.

THE STREET.

JOHN GIRTY was the twenty-third man in the bread line. He observed the number with a despairing humor that even his abnormal hunger could not wholly destroy. Then he shivered down into his scanty clothes, stamped his freezing feet, and resigned himself to wait with what stoical patience he could muster till the stroke of twelve should bring him the chance for a loaf of bread. Not until twelve each night did the bakery beside which he waited distribute its surplus loaves, as long as the stock held out, to any one who applied.

Girty had been in New York for three months, and he was determined to remain

for three times three more if need be, until his errand had been successful, or until he positively knew that it could not be. Helen Hume was somewhere among the four million people around him; he had promised himself to find her, and he meant to do it.

He had known Helen for ten years—ever since she was a child. He did not know how long he had loved her. He had always been fond of her, but he had not realized that affection for the child had changed to love for the woman till one day, returning home from a month's business trip, he learned that her mother had died suddenly, and that she had gone to New York to look for typewriting work. The pang with which he heard the news made him realize the truth.

Promptly he determined to follow her and ask her to come back to Montana with him. He did not know what she would say. He knew that she liked him; but he wanted more than liking, and her leaving without a word of farewell made him fear that more would be denied him. Nevertheless, he resolved to see her and find out. He scraped together what money he could get, placed his ranch in charge of his next-door neighbor, and started for New York. When he got there he found she had gone away from her first stopping-place with a Mrs. Edwards, address unknown.

Hopeless as the task seemed, he set out to find her. For three months he had tried, and for three months he had failed. Both she and Mrs. Edwards had vanished into the great city, leaving not even a ripple to mark their departure.

In the search Girty's money melted away; and he wrote home for more, but none came. He would not look for a job, "because," he thought, "it would prevent my searching. If I'm going to give up that, I might as well go home and be done with it." And so at last he had come to the bread line.

It was only a little past eight when he fell into line. He had four hours to wait. Girty could stand it; he was young and strong, and had not been weakened by years of—well, of the bread line; but he wondered how the derelicts ahead of him and those behind him could stand it. His hunger was real, vital, gnawing — a hunger that it seemed to him would tear a weaker man to pieces.

Somewhere a clock struck the half-hour, and, as if it were a signal, a tremor ran down the line. The waiting men poked their heads, terrapinlike, out of the shells of their coat-collars and craned their necks forward.

Girty leaned and looked like the rest. He was new to the line, and did not understand its movements; but he felt somehow that the thrill was one of hope; something to please the line was coming. Probably it conveyed a promise of something to eat or drink; for the hopes of men in the bread line are both elemental and humble.

Far up toward the head of the line Girty saw a warmly muffled man coming slowly toward him. As he passed along the line he stared deliberately, now at one, now at another of the men who composed it; at some he gazed for an instant only; others he scrutinized with careful insolence. Most of them put on a semblance of excitement as he approached and dropped back hopelessly when he passed on. None resented his scrutiny, though a few shrank into their rags and pulled down their hats as if in an effort to conceal their faces—newcomers, these—recruits forced into the line by the urgency of their stomachs and not yet resigned to the ignominy of accepting charity, even if only that of a loaf of bread.

Girty turned curiously to the man behind him—an old man, shaking with the racked nerves of the dipsomaniac who has been living for weeks on whisky and free-lunch crackers and bologna. "What's doing, Pete?" he demanded, with the freemasonry of the down and out.

The other looked at him. "One of those blame story-writers, I guess," he mumbled hoarsely. "Two or three of 'em turn up here most any night and pick out a hobo and hold him up for the story of his life at the point of a beer and pretzel. Say, if you're going to be here many and oft, you want to dream up some yarn and be ready to spiel on demand."

Girty looked back at the stranger and shook his head. "He's taking mighty good care to keep his face hidden, whoever he is," he objected doubtfully. "I don't believe he's a story-writer. I think he's looking for somebody. And he's frightened about something. See how he jumps when anybody comes up behind him. He's scared!"

Girty noticed that his neighbor was not listening and faced forward once more, just as the stranger halted close beside him and stared curiously into his face.

For a moment the two studied each other. Each saw a well-set-up young man of about

his own height and build. Girty could see little more, for the stranger's turned-up collar and turned-down hat left only his eyes and nose exposed. Girty, on the other hand, had no overcoat, and his wide-brimmed hat merely shadowed but did not conceal a face bristling with a four days' beard.

The stranger seemed satisfied with his inspection, for he stepped closer and spoke in a low tone, glancing around furtively as he did so. "I want to speak to you in private," he said. "Will you step over here a little way?"

Girty shook his head. "Not for me, pardner," he answered. "I haven't any story to tell you. And I don't want to lose my place in the line."

"Story?" The stranger's low voice was puzzled.

The man behind Girty broke in. "Aw, say," he ejaculated, "take me. I'll be your Sheherazade. I've got all sorts of pipe-dreams up my sleeve. For a sandwich and a beer I'll tell you all about the way Harriman did me out of me railroads. For a square meal I'll tell you of me false friend and faithless wife who skipped with me dough. For a—"

"That's enough!" The stranger shook his head and turned back to Girty. "I'm not looking for stories," he explained. "I want some one to do a job for me, and I think you'll about do it. Want to hear about it?"

"That's different." Girty promptly stepped out of the line and followed the other.

Once across the street, out of ear-shot of the line, the stranger halted.

"I said I wanted something done," he repeated. "I should have said that I wanted some one to stand ready to do something for me in case I should require it. The whole thing will be over in two hours at the outside. At the end of that time I will pay you ten dollars, whether I shall have needed you or not. Will you come?"

"What's the job?"

"That's my business at present. You'll be told in good time if you are needed. Just now you've merely to come with me, dress yourself in some clothes I will give you, and then do as you are told. Will you come? Quick, now!"

Girty nodded. "Sure I'll come," he declared. "If you'll stand me some food on account. I'd sell my immortal soul for grub to-night. Gee, but I'm hungry!"

The man nodded. "That will be all right," he acceded. "You may call me Mr. Edwards if you need a name. Come along!"

"Edwards!" Girty started. "Say," he began, "do you know a Mrs. Edwards who knows—"

He stopped, for the man was hurrying away without listening. Girty shrugged his shoulders and hurried after him. He would renew the question later.

He found little chance to do so, however. Edwards moved with feverish haste, rushing Girty to a barber-shop for a hurried shave, and then racing him through the streets to the door of an apartment-building exactly like thousands of others in the great city.

The two entered an elevator and shot upward. Evidently Edwards was known, for the boy stopped at the fifth floor without instructions. Edwards stepped out and led the way to a door which he opened with a latch-key.

The apartment was dark when the two entered, but Edwards immediately switched on the electrics, flooding it with light. Then he threw open an inside door. "Walk in," he said.

The room was in a state of extraordinary disorder. The floor was littered with paper, and bed and chairs alike were piled with articles of clothing. A trunk, tightly packed, stood open at one side, bearing mute testimony either to recent arrival or impending departure.

The room was hot, but Edwards did not take off his hat, nor throw open his coat. He merely pointed to a shirt and a dress-suit that lay upon the bed.

"Get into those at once," he directed. "I'll order something for you to eat; but you'll have to swallow it whole, for I have no time to spare." With the last word, he stepped through an inner door and closed it behind him.

Girty glanced at the clothes whimsically. "Good stuff," he remarked, feeling them critically. "Not new, but good. Clearly I am going to play the gentleman to-night. Well, I'm willing." Rapidly he slipped out of his well-worn suit and arrayed himself in the garments of fashion.

"This is a mighty queer go," he reflected aloud. "Colonel Jim Sterrett used to say that anything could happen, had happened, or was going to happen in New York; but I guess this stunt is just a little out of the ordinary, all the same. Evidently Edwards

doesn't mean me to see his face. Wonder whether he's meditating giving me the double cross, or whether he's so blame ugly he don't want to show his face? Oh, well, if Eddie will just give me something to eat, I don't care a hoot what comes next."

He broke off as he transferred a big revolver from hip-pocket to hip-pocket. "I'm just as glad I hung on to my murderer's friend, even if I was starving," he went on. "I'm kinder guessing I'll need it before the night's done. Never wore a dress-suit over one before, but I reckon I know now what it's got tails for; they're bully to hide the butt of a gun. Gee, I wish Edwards would hurry with that supper!"

Unthinkingly he plunged his hands into his trouser-pockets and brought up a knife and a key-ring. "Humph!" he muttered, "I reckon these are Eddie's clothes, and he's forgot to empty his pockets! Let's explore What's this? It feels plainly but decidedly plethoric."

From his breast-pocket he drew out a pocketbook. It contained visiting-cards for "John Herbert Edwards," two old letters addressed to the same person, and two railway tickets and two sleeper berths from New York to Seattle, good only on the New York Central train leaving New York at 12.25 A.M. that night. At sight of these last Girty's eyes glistened. "Heavens," he exclaimed, "I hope he means one of these for me!"

The inner door opened, and Edwards came in with a plate of crackers, a slice of cheese, and a tall black bottle. He was still muffled to the ears.

"This is all you'll have time to eat," he explained. "Get it into you, quick!"

Girty needed no second invitation. He sampled the bottle gingerly, but devoured the cheese and crackers in mighty gulps. Between mouthfuls he sought to explain. "There's some things in the pockets of these clothes," he observed. "I reckon you forgot them."

Edwards waved his hand impatiently. "Keep them till I ask for them," he said. "Have you had enough to eat?"

Girty rose. "Say, you'll never know how vain such a question is till you've got an appetite like mine. Enough? Good heavens, no! But I'm ready to suspend till I've earned my pay."

"Very well." Edwards handed him an overcoat. "Put this on," he directed. "Button it, and keep it buttoned." Then, as Girty obeyed, "Come!" he ordered.

Girty hesitated. "Just one minute," he interjected. "Do you know—"

"No, I don't know anything. I haven't time to know anything. Come on."

CHAPTER II.

THE CHURCH.

IN the street once more, the two men hastened westward for two blocks. Then, on a corner in the shadow of a high building, Edwards halted and looked cautiously around.

"See that church half-way down the block?" he questioned. "Well, go straight there. Don't stop to speak to any one. Particularly don't hesitate at the entrance. Hurry right in. Don't make any mistake about this; it's important. Once in, sit down in the nearest pew till some one comes for you. Then do what you're told. Understand?"

Girty nodded. The directions were simple, and he did understand them; but if they had been the least bit more complex he probably would not have done so. A strange drowsiness was pressing down his eyelids. He fought against it, and for a moment drove it away and started manfully toward the church. "Gee," he muttered, "that whisky must have been strong! I never thought a nip like that would make me sleepy. Reckon it's coming on an empty stomach that did the trick. Must brace up."

Brace up he did until he had passed through the door into the church, hot and heavy by contrast with the sharp night air; but dark except for a single lamp that burned at the doorway and the faint illumination of half a dozen candles burning on the altar. Girty noted one or two people close beside the latter, but his sleep-clogged brain refused to tell him more. He stumbled into the nearest pew, sat down, and immediately lost consciousness.

For how long Girty dozed in the pew he never learned, but it could not have been for long. He was roused by a hand on his shoulder and a strange voice speaking into his ear.

"Good heavens, man! What are you doing here?" demanded the unknown. "Everybody's waiting for you. Come along."

Dazedly Girty rose to his feet. "What's the matter?" he muttered.

"The matter? Oh, the darkness? I

don't know. Something's wrong with the current, and they can't turn on the lights. We'll have to get along with candles. It's all the better for you. Come! Get a hustle on you!"

Girty did not understand. A horrible something was pressing down his eyeballs and dulling his brain. Dully he felt that this must be the man who was to give him further instructions, and he obeyed mechanically, stumblingly following his guide up the long, dark aisle.

Half-way up the other paused, stared at Girty, sniffed, and threw up his hand despairingly. "Drunk!" he muttered disgustedly. "Drunk! Good heavens, man! Don't you know a false step may cost you your life? If I'd thought you hadn't any better sense than to get full, I'd have let you alone."

The speaker paused and groaned. Then: "Well, I've got to see you through now. Come!"

Deftly he caught Girty by the arm and propelled him rapidly toward the chancel, where several dim figures were waiting in the candle-light.

Not realizing in the least what he was doing, Girty obeyed the prompting arm and fell into place beside one of the figures. The instant he did so, another figure, facing him, opened a book and began to read.

The words seemed to come from a long way off, and at first he did not understand them. But, after a little something familiar in the verbiage reached his brain, he started and bent forward, trying to understand.

At that moment his guide jogged his elbow. "Say 'I will,'" he ordered savagely.

Mechanically, Girty obeyed. An instant later what seemed like an echo of the words came softly from the woman at his side, and at the sound the mists rolled partly back from his brain.

He was being married! Nay, he was married already, for in his ears rang the closing words, "Let not man put asunder."

The shock cleared his brain somewhat, but did not loosen the bond that lay upon his physical faculties. A fearful numbness seemed to clog his movements, binding them in a nightmare impotency. Desperately but vainly he tried to cry out to stop the ceremony; but the words would not come, and an instant later he found himself being led toward the sacristy, with a woman's hand resting on his arm.

Dimly he felt that the hand was trembling. Dimly he realized that the woman beside him was frightened almost to death. For a moment a wave of sympathy drove back the clouds that were settling down upon his brain, and he bent over. "Don't be afraid, little girl," he whispered thickly. "It's all right."

The woman seemed to catch her breath. She ceased trembling, and cast a swift glance upward. "I—I'll try not to be," she murmured.

Girty rocked like a ship in a seaway. He knew the voice. It was too dark for him to see anything, but he knew the voice. It was Helen's. Helen's! Even with his muddled brain, he knew it. He would have recognized it anywhere.

He had found her. He strove to speak—to tell her who he was. But the words would not come. The pall upon his senses was closing down again thicker than before. Scarcely could he keep his feet. Had it not been for the soft propulsion of the girl's arm he could not have moved at all.

Then they were at the office-door.

Mechanically, Girty stood aside and let the girl precede him. But as he made to follow her a hand grasped his arm and whirled him round to face a muffled form, from beneath whose bent-down hat-brim gleamed two furious eyes. "What in Hades does all this mean?" hissed the voice of Edwards.

Girty stared at the man stupidly. He did not understand.

Edwards gave him no time to think. The girl had gone on into the room; the minister and the guide had disappeared, and the two were alone.

"Oh, you unspeakable scoundrel!" he hissed, wringing his hands desperately. "Curse you! Why aren't you asleep back where I told you to wait? I gave you enough dope to make an ordinary man sleep. But it's only made you stupid." Violently he thrust the young fellow away from him.

Girty reeled back, catching at the edge of a pew to steady himself. As in a dream, he saw Helen—with veil thrown back—suddenly appear in the lamplight that streamed from the sacristy door. "Come, John!" she called.

Girty tried to move, but his limbs refused to bear him.

Edwards, however, sprang forward and caught the girl by the arm.

"Quick!" he exclaimed. "They're after me! We haven't a moment to lose. Come!"

Half leading, half dragging, he hurried the girl across the church to the left transept. There darkness swallowed them up; but Girty heard a door close, and realized dully that Edwards had taken Helen away.

With a great effort he lurched forward, fighting against the drug that had mastered him. As he did so a man hurried out of the sacristy and caught him by the arm.

"Good heavens! Are you tired of life?" demanded the newcomer in a voice that revealed his identity with the guide who had hustled him to the altar a few moments before. "Come and sign the register and get away as quick as the Lord will let you. Where's Helen?"

Girty did not answer, and the other shoved him through the sacristy door. "Goodness, what a pair of fools you two are! Here, you go and sign, and I'll quickly find her."

Girty moved into the room mechanically. Before him a book lay open on a desk, and beside it stood a young man in ministerial robes, holding in his hands a pen. "Sign here," he directed, smiling.

Girty obeyed; he would have obeyed any one at that moment. "John Girty," he wrote in shaky characters.

As he finished, the guide came hurrying back. "Where's Helen gone?" he cried. "I can't find—" His jaw dropped. "Who are you?" he demanded.

Girty could not answer. He only stood and stared fatuously.

"Who are you?" repeated the guide. "What are you doing here?" He glared at Girty; then started back. "The beast's drunk!" he cried disgustedly. "Here, get out, quick, if you don't want to be arrested." He glanced at the register. "You fool!" he raved, forgetful of his surroundings. "Even if you are drunk, you ought to know better than to butt in on a marriage ceremony like this."

Girty tried to explain that it was he and not Edwards who had been married, but no intelligible words would come.

The guide turned to the minister, who was looking sadly bewildered. He was an exceedingly young minister. "I don't know what has become of Mr. and Mrs. Edwards," he said. "They may have slipped away somewhere. If you'll excuse me, I'll put this fellow out on the sidewalk; and then I'll find Edwards and get him to sign. You can cancel this fellow's name, of course."

"Of course," replied the minister. But he spoke hesitatingly.

A moment later Girty found himself being precipitated down the church steps.

CHAPTER III.

THE ATTACK.

THE cold night air came to Girty as a shock after the heat of the church, reviving him and restoring him. His mind was still heavy, but with every step he took it stirred with fresh life. A hundred yards from the door he stopped and clapped his hands to the revolver in his pocket. "Good heavens!" he muttered wonderingly. "He's got my wife!" Sluggishly he turned upon his heel.

Just in time! As he turned, half a dozen men sprang out of the shadows of an areaway and made at him. He saw the gleam of steel in their uplifted hands.

Girty was heavy with drugs, but no man at all conscious would fail to understand an attack like this. The mere instinct of self-defense would have stirred a deaf and blind man to resistance. Girty's right hand, grasping his revolver, came up with a precision that spoke long experience in the use of weapons, and almost unconsciously he fired, once, twice, thrice. One assailant reeled back, but the rest came on; and the next moment Girty went staggering back, with a knife-blade in his shoulder.

Of what happened next Girty never had any very clear recollection. For an instant a phantasmagoria of demoniacal forms swung before his eyes, and a chorus of furious curses in some foreign tongue rang in his ears. Then, abruptly, he found himself sitting on the steps of a house alone. The assassins had gone as suddenly as they had come, leaving their work unfinished.

Girty sat still, clutching at his wounded shoulder uncomprehendingly; sat still as doors opened and windows were flung up; sat still as a crowd gathered around him; sat still until an ambulance clanged through the press and a surgeon ran up to his side, tended his wound, and held some fiery stimulant to his lips.

"Drink this," he ordered. "You got only a flesh cut," he went on. "Nothing serious. But you'd better go home and send for your own physician. Or I can take you to the hospital if you like."

Girty had no home, and he certainly did

not intend to go to a hospital. He had something to do first. His brain, dazed with the maddening mystery of the night, had suddenly focused itself into a belief that Edwards had first drugged him and then sought to murder him; and that Edwards had stolen Helen. Good heavens! Helen was *his* wife! He could not guess how she had come to be in the church, nor how she had come to be marrying Edwards. He did not care. Whoever she had meant to marry, she had actually married him! She was his —his! He must find her at once. If Edwards had harmed her, Edwards should die.

Swiftly his brain cleared. The doctor's stimulant was potent, and momently it swept away the cobwebs. "Thank you," he murmured faintly, but decidedly. "Thank you. I'll be all right if you will give me a lift for a block or two till I get away from this crowd."

"Sure! Jump in!"

Girty climbed in. As he did so he looked around curiously, remembering that he had fired three shots and wondering if all had been ineffective. But he saw no sign of any injured men and forebore to ask, lest police complications might intervene and restrict his freedom of action.

So he leaned back in the springy ambulance and waited.

Two blocks away from the crowd, close to an Elevated station, the ambulance stopped. "Will this do you?" asked the surgeon.

Girty nodded, and got out. Either the doctor's dose or the blood-letting had counteracted the effects of Edwards's drug, for he felt almost as clear-headed as when he stood in the bread line a few hours before.

Beneath a gas-lamp he searched his pockets. He remembered that there had been things in them—things that he had wanted to return to Edwards—but that the latter had told him to keep till later. Now, he wondered whether they might not give him some clue to Edwards's whereabouts.

Hopefully he searched, bringing to light many things, among them the wallet with the railway tickets to Seattle: "Good only on the train leaving New York at 12.05 A.M. on the date stamped." The words took on new significance now. The tickets were for Edwards—for Edwards and for Helen—for the woman to whom he had that night been wedded. If he could get to the station in time, he might find Edwards there.

Could he get there in time? He had no watch, but a clock in a near-by drug-store gave him the time—11.55. He had fifty minutes to spare.

Girty did not know New York very well, but he knew that the Elevated trains that roared overhead would take him to the Forty-Second Street station.

But did he have the money? With feverish haste he sought in his vest-pocket and found some small silver. Clearly Edwards must have changed his clothes in very great haste and have left nearly everything in the pockets.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RAILWAY STATION.

TEN minutes later Girty entered the Forty-Second Street station. His heart failed him as he noted its immensity, but rebounded as he saw that it was almost empty. From side to side and up and down, in continually mounting anxiety, he hurried, scanning the face of every couple he passed. He was not even sure as to the appearance of those he sought. Edwards had steadily kept his face concealed, and the girl's face had been obscured by the gloom of the church. He believed that he would recognize them both, but as time fled away he begun to mistrust his recollection.

He had almost abandoned hope when he saw a veiled and muffled couple come in through the swinging-door at the far side of the huge room. Hopefully he hurried toward them, reaching them just in time to hear the man exclaim in Edwards's well-remembered voice: "Heavens, I left my tickets in the dress-suit I gave that hobo!"

Girty did not wait to hear the girl's answer. With his uninjured arm he caught Edwards by the shoulder and whirled him round. "Now, Mr. Edwards," he cried savagely, "we'll have an explanation." As he spoke, he snatched the man's turned-down hat from his head, revealing a face not unlike his own, but swarthier.

For an instant Edwards cowered back. Then, with an inarticulate cry, he darted forward and snatched the hat from Girty's hand and clapped it over his own head and eyes. Then, and not till then, did he speak.

"You!" he cried. "You!'

"Yes, I!" Girty's anger was mounting. "Your friends didn't quite do for me, though they tried hard enough. I've come for Helen."

"For heaven's sake!" Edwards made a motion, imploring silence.

But Girty would not stop. "Yes," he reiterated fiercely, "for Helen, my wife!" He gesticulated toward the girl.

The latter had shrunk back, gasping, at Girty's attack. But now, with a swift motion, she flung back her veil, showing a pale face in which gleamed two frightened eyes. "John! John!" she cried. "Where did you come from? What does all this mean? Oh, I knew something was wrong—desperately wrong! What is it? What is it?"

Girty glanced around. No one seemed to be noticing or to be within ear-shot. "I don't know what it means, Helen," he babbled. "I came to New York to find you, and to-night by some skulduddery I was drugged by that man yonder and was married to you in a darkened church not an hour ago. I was so doped that I could not speak. A moment later you were snatched away from me, and I was flung out of the church. Almost on the steps I was attacked and knifed, and only by some miracle escaped being murdered. I came here because I found two railway tickets in my pocket, and hoped I might find you here. Whether by accident or by design, you are my wife, and I shall not let you go away with another man."

The girl's cheeks had grown paler and paler. Uncertainly her gaze wandered to Edwards, who had stood quaking as Girty blazed out his words.

"Oh, what does it mean?" she gasped.

Edwards glanced around him furtively. "Hush! Hush!" he begged. "I must not be recognized. This man lies. I never saw him before. You are my wife. Mine! I swear it!"

"You are mine!" Girty cut in. "You are my wife and not his. All I have told you is true. He tore you away from me at the door of the sacristy. I was drugged and helpless. But it is all true."

"Drugged! Nonsense!" scoffed the other. "If you were drugged, how did you get over it so quick?"

"The doctor who bound up my cut gave me something that set me right." He turned to the girl. "It is true what I tell you!" he cried. "True! True! You know me, Helen! You have known me for years. You know I would not lie to you."

Edwards tried to speak, but the girl stopped him. "No, John," she said, "I know you would not lie to me knowingly. But neither do I think Mr. Edwards would deceive me. He has been too kind. Forgive me, both of you; but—but this is everything to me, and—and I must know—know! The man I married spoke to me at the door of the sacristy. What he said only he and I can know. If I married you, Mr. Edwards, you can tell me what those words were. What were they, Mr. Edwards?"

Edwards shrank back, hesitated, stammered, and flung up his hands despairingly. "I don't know," he wailed. "I don't know! Oh, it's no use fighting! It's true what he says. It's true!"

"True! That I was married to him and not to you?" Anger spoke in the girl's tones, but Girty's heart leaped as he noted that they contained no tremor of despair, nor even of regret.

Desperately Edwards thrust out his hand. "Wait! Wait!" he pleaded. "Wait till I tell you all. You know the warning I received. You know that my only safety was in flight. You agreed to marry me and fly with me. But I was watched. I knew that I could not escape so easily. I learned that the fiends intended to wait for me outside the church. So I got a substitute—this man. I thought he looked something like me—enough to fool the murderers in the dark. I dressed him in my own clothes. I took him near the church and sent him in. When I saw he was safely there I hurried around and came in by the back. I was too late. This man's disguise had been too perfect. It had deceived Forbes, and Forbes had forced him to go through the ceremony. I was half mad. I could not lose you after all that had come and gone. You did not know this man. You did not mean to marry him. He was acting in my name; on my license. In effect he was my proxy. That made you my wife, not his. I hurried you away, leaving him—"

"Leaving him to be murdered!" The girl's voice was cold as ice.

"No — no! Not that! Only to gain time. I swear it. He ran some risk, yes. But not much. I was sure the mistake would be found out in time to save him from serious harm. And it *was* found out. You see, it was found out. That must have been how he escaped. Wasn't that how?" He whirled upon Girty.

Girty hesitated. "I suppose you are right about their having found out their mistake —whoever *they* are—in time," he grated; "for they could have killed me easily if they

had wanted to do so. But I've got an idea that you hoped they wouldn't find out. But that's neither here nor there. The point is that I have been in New York looking for this lady for three months, and that she is my wife and not yours."

"You lie! She is my wife! You acted only as my proxy. Helen, tell him to go."

But Girty answered. "I acted as no one's proxy," he thundered. "I married Helen Hume in my own name — John — and I signed the church register in my own name —John Girty. If the clergyman married us on a license made out for some one else, that is his mistake. It gives you no rights."

The young fellow paused. "Of course," he went on, turning to the girl, who stood staring from one to the other, "of course, Miss Helen, you can easily get this marriage set aside. If you don't want to be my wife, and do want to marry this man, I'll put no obstacles in the way of your getting a divorce. I'll take you to your home now; and, if you wish it, I'll never see you again. But—but"—Girty's voice grew tender—"but if you will come with me, Helen—Oh, little girl, little girl, I love you so! I've loved you so long. When you went away it was like death. I've been hunting for you ever since. Oh, Helen, Helen!"

The voice of the train-caller rumbled through the depot, calling the Chicago train. At the sound Edwards straightened up.

"Enough of this nonsense, Helen," he flung out. "You're my wife. If you're not, we can be married again to-morrow. Meanwhile, they're calling our train. It leaves in ten minutes. Come!"

But the girl did not move.

"John is right, Mr. Edwards," she decided gently. "He is right, and I thank him from the bottom of my heart for saving me. I am not your wife, Mr. Edwards, and I will never be. I will never marry a man who could send another man unsuspectingly to his death."

"But—"

"To his death!" repeated the girl firmly. "That was what you intended. I am sure of it. You—"

"Ha, ha!" Edwards laughed wildly. "I see. You are glad to get out of it. You are glad to throw me off. You never loved me. You—"

"I never said I loved you," interrupted the girl. "I told you plainly more than once that I did not. When your mother died and you begged me to marry you, I said that I would do so, and that I would try to learn to love you. I never would have consented if I had known—what John has just told me. But I didn't know. I left a message for him when I left home, and I didn't hear from him. I thought he had forgotten me. I see now that my message could never have reached him. I did not recognize him in that dark church to-night. How should I? I thought him thousands of miles away. But his voice recalled him to me, and I repented—oh, I repented—that I had lost him forever! I prayed that I might suddenly wake up and find my marriage all a dream. God has answered my prayer." She held out her hands to Girty.

Edwards sneered. "Ha, ha! That's good. I congratulate you on your choice. Do you know where I picked this fellow up to-night? Out of the bread line—the bread line! He was standing with the other hoboes waiting for a hand-out of a loaf of bread. He was starving. He's got my clothes on now. Come back to me, Helen."

But the girl only clasped Girty's hand.

Girty drew her closer. "It's no use, Edwards," he declared. "You've lost, and you might as well give up. Come, Helen, we've got to catch the train."

"The train! What train?" Edwards shot out the question derisively. "You've got no money to take any train."

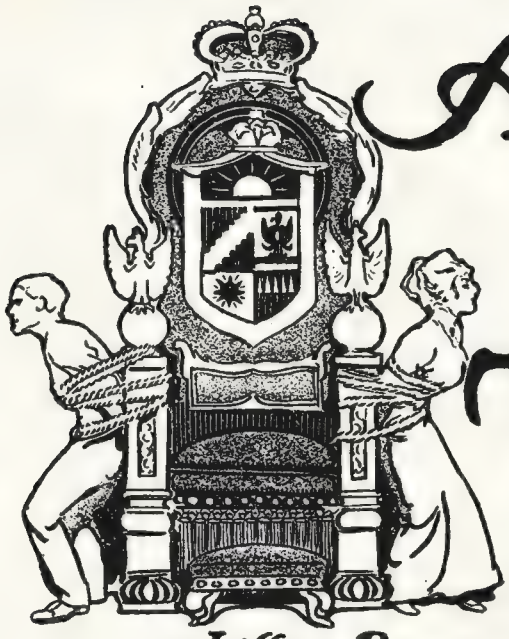
Girty laughed. "No, I haven't got much money; that's true, Edwards," he answered. "But I've got two tickets and two berths clean through to Seattle. And I've got about two dollars in change you left in the pockets of this suit. I guess you owe it all to me for getting me half murdered to-night; but if you'll give me your address, I'll send it back to you after I get home to Montana."

"Train for Chicago and the Northwest!" sang out the caller. "All abo-o-ard!"

Impulsively the girl stretched out her hand. "Good-by, Mr. Edwards," she said hastily. "You've been good to me, and I thank you. But— Good-by!" Hand in hand with Girty she dashed for the gate.

For a moment Edwards gazed after the pair with dropping jaws. Then he abruptly sprinted after them. Close to the gate he overtook them and thrust a wallet into Girty's hand. "Take it, you fool!" he panted. "You can't get to Montana on two dollars. My address is inside. Send it back if you like. God bless you, Helen! Good-by!"

As the train moved out they saw him standing there.



A Flight from a Throne

By

Lillian Bennet-Thompson

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

JOHN ALLERTON, of Latin-American descent, whose grandfather in the old days was Emperor of Chilquitina in South America, has been given his *congé* by his *fiancée*, Madge Craig, who apparently throws him over because he has lost his fortune. He leaves immediately for South America, to save, if possible, the remnants of his wealth—extensive holdings in Chilquitina—though pestered by an emissary from that country, who tries to hand him an important looking blue envelope which the young man refuses to receive, throwing it out of the car window. When Allerton and his friend, Ted Norton, arrive in Chilquitina, they find the country on the verge of a revolution. Perez, the present president, is unpopular and is working very hard to oust Allerton from possession of his coffee plantation. Miguel Roberto and General Zella have formed a royalist party with the evident purpose of reinstating the old royal family. Allerton is to be emperor and to marry Marie Carlos, who is descended from the same Emperor of Chilquitina as he. Astonished and angry at this policy, Allerton denounces the scheme as idiotic, and refuses to have anything to do with it. The two natives attempt to hold him prisoner, but he announces that he is going to his plantation. A quarrel ensues and Allerton completely loses his temper, while Zella and Roberto attempt to hold him by force.

Allerton and Norton break, because the latter does not care for the way Allerton has treated the fair Marie. Allerton goes to his plantation, but is enticed from there by a message which purports to come from Madge Craig who has come to Chilquitina. He meets her at the executive mansion and learns from her that the misunderstanding between them is largely trumped up by Mrs. Craig. Everything begins to brighten, when President Perez stalks into the room, and captures Craig, to whom it is now clear that Madge has been treacherous. Broken-hearted, he allows himself to be led to a dungeon, there to wait for his death, which Perez has promised will come shortly.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LIBERATION.

"SEÑOR!" It was not the voice of the sergeant, but there was something vaguely familiar in its tones. Allerton here rose.

"I am ready," he said steadily.

A key grated in the lock, and, as the door swung open, he stepped out into the passage. But where were the rest of the soldiers? Here was only one man, holding a lantern above his head.

"Quiet, *señor!* It will not do to make too much noise. The walls may have ears. Follow me!"

This story began in The Cavalier for May.

"Where?" asked Allerton.

For answer, the man pointed along the passage, and Allerton suddenly realized that he was not being led to execution.

"Lead on," he said, and the man glided ahead.

In some places the roof was so low that they had to stoop to avoid striking their heads against the rocks; in others the passage narrowed until it was scarcely more than two feet wide. Winding almost in spirals, and picking their way over fallen stones and pieces of rock, they hurried on.

Allerton followed his guide in absolute silence. He was unable to understand what or who had brought about his unexpected rescue; but he had little curiosity. The change from utter hopelessness was so sudden, so unthought of, that it left him without the power to even conjecture. And the original treachery that had caused his capture still filled him with bitter, impotent anger.

Ahead of them the passage forked to right and left.

"To the left, *señor*," advised the man.

"Where does the other go?"

"It leads to a stairway under the confessional in the church. That door is almost at the foot of the steps. In times of trouble the fathers used to escape through the passage to the river."

"And where does this take us?"

For answer, the man slipped ahead and opened a heavy wooden door. A cool, damp breath of air fanned Allerton's cheek. He stepped through the doorway, and found himself in a little boxlike room, wood-walled on three sides and on top, the front covered by heavy bushes.

The guide thrust the screen of stems and leaves aside and motioned the American to pass out. They were on the low, muddy shore of the river; the sluggish current lapping within a yard of their feet. All around the vegetation was thick; so densely did the trees and bushes grow that the opening into the passage would have been invisible to any one standing directly in front of it, unless he had known it was there and had made systematic search.

A few feet away was the small dock where they had landed a few hours before, and the skiff bobbing up and down at the end of the painter.

Pale streaks of light silvered the eastern sky; the clouds turned swiftly to gold and rose. The guide unfastened the rope that held the boat to the dock, and drew the craft to their feet.

"It is unsafe for the *señor* to cross here," he said. "A mile above the city you may venture to row across and down again on the other side of the river. Keep close to the shore, or some prying eyes may observe you."

Mechanically Allerton stepped into the boat and picked up the oars.

"I don't know just why you have done this for me," he said, as he slipped the oars into the row-locks; "but whatever your reason, you won't find me ungrateful." He hesitated for a moment. "Did—did the *señorita* send you?" he asked wistfully.

The man shook his head.

"But no, *señor*. It was of my own accord that I came. The *señor* does not remember me, is it not so?"

Allerton looked at him closely.

"I've seen you before," he said, "but I can't remember where. Why should you risk your life and liberty to save me, and who are you?"

"I am Pedro," the man said simply. "Only one of the soldiers. But perhaps the *señor* remembers the man whom he saved from the river but a little ago. I am he; and I only risk in the *señor's* service what is his own to do with as he likes."

"Now I remember," said Allerton. Indeed, it was not strange that he had not recalled the fellow's face before. He had not noticed particularly what sort of a looking man he had pulled out of the river on the day of his arrival at Puerto Manuel; and if the incident had made small impression on him at the time, so much had followed on its heels as to drive it completely from his mind.

"You are a good fellow, Pedro," he said, "and I hope you won't be made to suffer for your part in this. If I get out with a whole skin, I'll have something to say to you later on. Meanwhile—" he held out his hand.

Pedro took it in both his own, but instead of shaking it, he bent quickly over and pressed his lips on the palm.

"Our Lady guard you, *señor*," he said gravely. "Venture not into the city again; there is danger for you. The *señorita* prays you may be safe. I have told her that I would save you if I could."

The smile faded quickly from Allerton's face.

"She did not understand," he said

briefly; "nor did you, I suppose, or you would not have brought me that note last night. You were the messenger, were you not?"

"*Si, señor.* But time flies. Soon the city will be astir, and it will not do for the *señor* to be found here." He stepped back, caught the stern of the boat and gave it a powerful shove out into the current.

Allerton looked back once and waved his hand. Under the shadow of the overhanging vines the boat crept slowly up-stream.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE HOSTAGES.

NORTON stopped in his restless pacing of the veranda and turned to Simpkins, who, his hands plunged deep in his pockets, leaned against the doorway.

"For Heaven's sake, man!" he cried, "can't you suggest something? Here we are, doing nothing, while he may be dying —dead!"

Simpkins now drew out one hand and scratched his head with a characteristic gesture.

"I pass," he said. "Ten minutes before you showed up last night he was here. And then, all of a sudden, he ain't; and the earth might have opened and swallowed him up for all the trace there is of him. It beats me."

"Look! Who is that?" cried Marie Carlos. She was leaning over the veranda rail, and pointing up the river. Close inshore a small skiff was coming downstream. Its solitary occupant was rowing with slow, uneven strokes.

"Whoop!" yelled Norton. "It's Jack! He's safe!" With a bound, he cleared the steps and dashed through the trees at the top of his speed.

Allerton dropped the oars and looked up with lusterless eyes.

"Hallo, Ted," he said tonelessly. "I'm glad you're here. Is that Miss Carlos I see on the veranda? Tell Simpkins I want him, will you?"

He dragged himself out of the boat and made the painter fast.

"But for Heaven's sake, where—" Norton was beginning.

"Never mind that now. I haven't got time to explain. Please tell—ah, here he comes!"

The agent was hurrying toward them.

"Simpkins," Allerton went on, still in the same monotonous voice, "take the launch and go over to Hiltique. Find General Zella and bring him back with you. Don't lose a second. If he won't come, tell him it's a matter of life and death for all of us, including himself. Bring him if you have to do it at the point of a gun. That's all. Hurry!"

He turned away and started toward the house.

"Yes, sir," said Simpkins. Without another word, he jumped into the launch, and the sharp explosions of the engine snapped out on the still air. Then he turned to the tiller, and began directing the course of the launch with as much energy as if he had not been up all night, searching vainly for the man who had just returned so strangely.

Norton stood watching the foaming wake for a moment, and then followed his friend. He was not a little alarmed at Allerton's looks and actions. The planter seemed to have aged terribly in the last twenty-four hours. His face was white and drawn, and he appeared to move and speak as if half awake.

Marie Carlos, with a little cry, ran to the top of the steps, her hands outstretched.

"Can you ever forgive me for the trouble I have caused you—for the danger I have brought upon you?" she said. "You were right and I was wrong; but I did not then understand it. As soon as it was made clear to me, I hurried to Mr. Norton."

"Yes," chimed in Norton, laboriously mounting the steps. "She came to beg me to warn you. Roberto is going to fix you, it seems. We tried to get across yesterday morning early, but the whole riverfront was watched, and we had to wait until after dark last night before we could sneak across. And when we got here, you were gone. Where the deuce have you been all night?"

"Then it must have been you I heard," Allerton mused. "I thought it was some enemy. But you must not speak of having brought danger upon me, Miss Carlos. The peril into which I have, all unwittingly drawn you, is far greater. When I think of what I am responsible for, I—"

"Well, for Heaven's sake, *what* is it?" demanded Norton impatiently. "You keep talking in a circle and don't get any-

where. What is the danger, anyway? And how are you responsible for it, any more than the rest?"

Allerton dropped into a chair and passed his hand over his eyes.

"Perez knows of the imperialist conspiracy," he said, slowly, "and the lives of Roberto, Zella—all of us—aren't worth a snap of my fingers! I don't know why he has held his hand so long—why he did not strike last night."

Norton staggered back a pace or two.

"You don't mean—?" he gasped.

"I do. You remember my telling you how a chap on the limited tried to sell me something or other, the day I came back from Boston? And how I chucked the stuff out of the window? Well, it has fallen into the hands of Perez; and those papers, as you know, contained the explanation of the part I was expected to play in Roberto's opera."

"And what are we to do?" asked Norton dazedly. "It's treasonable conspiracy, you know—punishable by death. I—what—how—" The magnitude of the disaster seemed to have stunned him, and he could only stare helplessly from Marie to Allerton and back to the girl again.

Allerton shrugged his shoulders with a weary gesture,

"*Quien sabe?*" he said. "I have sent for Zella, and I shall tell him what has happened. Of course, he will naturally suppose that I have broken my word of honor and have betrayed them. Whether or not I can convince him of my innocence, at least in that, remains to be seen. He can do as he thinks best.

"But, if Perez will accept me as a hostage for the good behavior of the rest, he can stand me up as a target and welcome."

He rose and entered the house, before either of his amazed hearers could collect themselves sufficiently to utter a word.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ALLERTON'S PLAN.

MARIE CARLOS'S eyes filled with tears. "The dear, foolish boy!" she said unsteadily. "To think that he could believe us capable of accepting such a sacrifice! We stand or fall together. But—we can't just keep on doing nothing. Something must be done at once, Mr. Norton. Can't you suggest anything?"

Norton shook his head gloomily.

"It's too deep for me," he said. "I don't understand it at all. It looks to me as if both ends were working against the middle — with the government and the revolutionists at the ends and us in the middle.

"As for Jack—he's a bigger puzzle than all the rest put together. Something's hit him and hit him hard. If this had happened yesterday, he'd have been full of fight—been going around here looking for scalps. And now he just says he'll give himself up, to be shot full of holes!" He shuddered.

"Why, when I saw his face a few minutes ago, I thought I was looking at a ghost! Where was he all night? He doesn't say. I can't get a word out of him. How did he find out that Perez knows about this revolution scheme? Who told him? Has he seen Perez? It looks that way, but—"

"You don't suppose—they *made* him—tell?" whispered the girl.

Norton laughed shortly.

"You don't know Jack," he said. "He passed his word not to give it away, and torture couldn't have dragged it from him. But—but he looks as if they had tried. It makes me sick to see him; he's been hurt somehow, and I can't—"

"Can't you ask him?"

"If he'd wanted me to know, he'd have told me. The very fact of his not saying anything proves that—"

The door opened and Allerton came out again. He had changed his torn and disordered clothing for a suit of white flannels and a soft white silk shirt; in his hand was a cigarette.

"I've been thinking," he said slowly, "that it's hardly square to keep you in the dark about this matter. A good deal of it concerns no one but myself; but the rest I'll have to tell to the general when he comes—if he does come—and there didn't seem to be any use in going over the same ground twice. Nothing to be gained by it. Are you willing to wait a while—until we find out if the general is still at liberty?"

"At liberty?"

"Yes. I mean, if Perez hasn't acted. You'll wait?"

"Certainly," said Miss Carlos promptly, and Norton nodded without speaking.

So they sat in silence, each busy with

thought, until the little agent trotted up the path, followed by the tall figure of the general. Allerton rose and led the way into the library.

There, grouped about the table, they waited for him to speak. He addressed them all, but kept his eyes fixed on Zella, as if the explanation were due to him, and the others were present merely as spectators.

"Last night," he began, in the same colorless voice, so different from his usual musical tones, "I was summoned to a certain house in Hiltique. The manner of my receiving the note and the identity of the sender prevented me from suspecting any treachery. I was warned to speak of my destination to no one, as I was in danger of my life. Accordingly, I returned with the messenger, without apprising even Simpkins of my departure.

"Shortly after my arrival in the city President Perez entered the room to which I had been shown, and informed me that I was a prisoner; that the envelope which contained the plans for the imperialist uprising, and of which I had refused to accept delivery, under a misconception as to the nature of its contents, had lately fallen into his hands. He was, therefore, fully cognizant of—"

"One moment, *señor,*" interposed the general. "You have not said from whom this message came."

"Nor shall I."

"It is advisable that you disclose the name, *señor.*"

"I received that message from a person whose name it is not necessary, in my opinion, to mention here. Suffice it to say, that it was a purely private matter and had absolutely nothing to do with Chilquitinian politics."

"But the subsequent events proved very clearly that Chilquitinian politics were largely involved by the consequences which attended your receipt of the note," observed the general. "You still decline to disclose the name of the sender?"

"I do."

The general bowed.

"Proceed," he said.

"President Perez further informed me that he proposed to nip the revolution in the bud by putting me out of the way," continued Allerton; "and accordingly sent me under arrest to the black cells.

"I was enabled to escape by the help of a native, who fancied himself under obligations to me; and I returned here this morning and sent for you, general, in order that you might try to come to some understanding with Perez. Your present position is one of great danger, as you, of course, are aware."

"What about yours?" asked Norton quite dryly.

Allerton met his eyes squarely.

"That," he said calmly, "is a matter for Perez to decide. By my own act, yet through no overt fault, I have placed all your lives in jeopardy, and it is for me to do the best I can to save you from the consequences of my blunder. Had I read that letter as I should have done, all this calamity would have been averted.

"My visit to the city last night has not altered the situation for the better or worse. Before I went, Perez was in full possession of all the information he had when I left it early this morning. But I am in no position personally to treat with him. I am the prime offender, in his eyes; first, for being the lineal descendant of Manuel II, and second for being John Allerton, of New York.

"Once let him get his hands on me and he would laugh at any plea I might make for clemency for the rest. The only way is for the general to secure his promise—and secure it in such a way that it shall be binding—that if I am delivered up to him, the other parties to the conspiracy are exempt." He turned to General Zella.

"One thing I beg you to believe," he said earnestly, "is that I have kept my word to you. I am no traitor. Perez's information did not come from me—not the smallest part of it—however black the evidence seems. I was not in sympathy with your plan of deposing Perez, but I took no steps against you."

"No," said the general sourly. "No, *señor.* You did not. The Señorita Craig was the one who did that."

Norton fell back in his chair.

"Madge Craig!" he gasped. "She—she told Perez! She sent for Jack! That is what—"

Allerton turned savagely upon him.

"Be quiet!" he commanded fiercely. "How dare you accuse her of such a thing?"

Even though he knew the girl to be guilty, he could not bear that others should share his knowledge. Although he knew she had tricked and sent him to almost

certain death, it filled him with passionate resentment to hear a word spoken, even hinted, against her.

"You are mistaken, general," he told Zella, more quietly. "The lady had no thought, no intention—"

"The intention does not signify," the old man interrupted. "The *señora* brought the envelope to Perez; the *señorita* knew the contents. So much we have learned from our agent, the man who delivered the papers to you, and who afterward traced them from the time your hasty hand flung them from the car window. We had doubted your story, *señor,* but it has been verified in every particular."

Allerton nodded.

"That's all right," he said. "But we waste time. The main issue now is the safety of you and of my friends. I am no diplomat; but if you will undertake the negotiations with Perez—"

"But this is ridiculous!" cried Marie Carlos impulsively. "It is barbarous! We are not living in the stone age, Mr. Allerton. This is a civilized country, and we are civilized people. Do you suppose we are going to permit you to sacrifice yourself in such a way?"

"It sounds like a novel," Norton observed, puffing clouds of smoke from his cigarette. "The villain—the heroine—hero steps in and offers to die to save her. My gad, general," he suddenly burst out, his overwrought nerves slipping from control, "this is too monstrous! There's some other way to save every one — there must be! Why, not even Perez would dare harm an American!"

"You do not know the man—nor Chilquitina," the general said curtly. "But there is one other way—if it is not now too late." He whirled upon Allerton. "Run the imperial standard up on the flagpole on your own roof! It is the signal agreed upon! The people will rise in instant revolt—the army will be divided against itself! Perez must fall! It is the way—the only way to save us all!

"Do you consent, *señor?*" His voice was shrill. "Speak! Will you be Emperor of Chilquitina—or must we all suffer shameful deaths? Once let that flag be flung to the breeze—"

The door swung open with a crash against the wall, and Mrs. Simpkins, her face betraying her agitation, rushed into the room.

"Oh, Mr. Allerton, quick!" she cried breathlessly. "Oh, come, please! This is terrible!"

CHAPTER XIX.

MADGE'S LETTER.

ALLERTON sprang to his feet and darted past her. The hall was empty, but the front door stood wide open; and as he reached the veranda a horrible sight met his eyes.

Half upon the low steps, half upon the short-cropped grass, the brilliant emerald hue of which contrasted oddly with his once gaudy uniform, now stained and dripping with water, a man lay in a crumpled heap.

One arm was bent under him; the other half outstretched; the fingers clutched a muddy, torn envelope. The face, white, twisted in agony, was upturned, as if in supplication. The eyes were closed. With a shout of "Ted! Here!" Allerton leaped forward. The man's lids flickered, and two bloodshot eyes looked up feelingly at the American.

"*Señor!* Read and act! Lose not a moment if you would save her!" The words were scarcely more than a whisper; the hand holding the envelope moved feebly.

"What is it, Jack? Great Heavens!" Norton had hurried from the house, followed by the general and Simpkins; and now bent over the wounded man, whose nerveless fingers still clutched the message he had so nearly lost his life in delivering.

"Carry him into the house; and you, Simpkins, do the best you can for him," Allerton directed. He carefully disengaged the envelope and tore it open. It contained a letter—in the handwriting of Madge Craig! The missive ran, without preface:

If you have any thought of me, it must be to despise me. But if they are not yet lying to me, you are alive; and I must tell you, before I go to my living death, that I did not understand. I was innocent of any intent to bring harm to you.

I loathe myself when I think of what I have made you suffer; yet I thought I was doing you a service—a great service—when I sent for you to come to me last night. Had it not been that I saw you with my own eyes, manacled and helpless, guarded by armed men, I could not have believed it. Even now it is difficult for me to credit

such hideous treachery—such a breach of faith on the part of President Perez.

Pedro, the man who will try to take this to you, has just left me. He was one of the guard who conducted you to the cells below the palace, and he has told me what they are going to do with you. I believe I must have fainted at the news of what I had brought upon you; for I suddenly found myself alone.

And then Perez came in; he has but just left me. He tells me that you are still living and will be well treated until to-morrow at noon, when you will be taken out and shot as a traitor, unless I comply with his conditions.

He is a monster! I loathe and hate him. I did not know that such men lived. But we are both in his power. I have no means of knowing whether or not he is speaking the truth, or whether he is trying to deceive me again. But if God is good to me, and you are still alive and well, perhaps you will receive this and will believe what I write. For I cannot rest until you know that I thought to help, not harm you.

When I sent for you to come to me, it was because I was told by Perez that you were in danger. He said that he had learned of a plot which was on foot to make you Emperor of Chilquitina; but that unless he could warn you, you would be betrayed by certain men who were working against you.

He told me he feared for your life; that, secretly, he was in sympathy with your cause, although you did not know it. You, of course, believing him your enemy, would not come to his house, and he therefore begged me to help him to aid you.

I believed him. Readily I consented to send for you, that he might warn you against the counterplot that was being organized against you; and at his express desire I made no mention of his name, for fear the letter would fall into the hands of his enemies and yours. And then, in the joy of seeing you again and knowing that you still cared for me, I forgot everything but that we were together once more. The rest you know.

I am now closely confined to my room, and cannot learn whether Pedro's plan for your escape has succeeded or failed. He told me, I think, just before I fainted, that he would try to help you to get away. I have bribed one of the maids to give this to him for you.

I am in a net from which there is no escape. Perez declares that your life is in my hands. There is but one thing to do. It may be that I am wrong; that what I am about to do will not help you. But if he has lied to me, there is always one way out.

I shall never see you again in this world, Jack; but I want you to know that I love you, and that I always have and shall. I have been duped from beginning to end. I do not know how much my mother is responsible for my doubts of you; but I am the more to blame. I should have trusted you, believed in you through everything.

The time is short and I can write no more. I pray that you may be safe. Try not to hate me, dear. And sometimes when you are back in our own dear country, and all this terrible time is like a half-forgotten dream, think kindly of

MADGE.

"Jack," said Norton from the doorway, "come here! This fellow says he must speak with you!"

Allerton crushed the letter into his pocket and ran back into the library, where the unfortunate Pedro lay upon a couch, with Simpkins working over him.

"Broken leg; shot in three other places," said the agent, skilfully adjusting a bandage. "I guess he'll pull through; but it'll be a hard fight. How he ever managed to get here alive, Mr. Allerton—"

"Señor Allerton!" came faintly from Pedro. "The *señorita*—I could not send her word—the maid is dead. They shot me—but I brought the letter!" The words came in labored gasps. "She—did—not—know—"

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed Allerton. "She—the *señorita* is in danger! What is it? Where is she? Is—"

The man's shaking, blood-stained hand pointed to the clock. It marked the half hour after eleven.

"To save you—at twelve—she—marries—" The voice choked and ceased.

The room swam before Allerton's eyes. In half an hour Madge Craig would marry José Perez, to save the man she loved! They had told her that he was still a prisoner and would be shot unless she sacrificed herself! And they had killed the maid who might have told her the truth, and nearly killed Pedro! And Madge, tortured by doubts, not knowing whether she was selling herself in vain—

As through a mist, he saw the scene which in a short half hour would be enacted before the altar of the little church in the capitol. The priest—the cruel, gloating face of Perez—the shrinking girl, victim of hideous deception and intrigue—

"General!" he cried loudly. "*The flag!* THE FLAG!"

CHAPTER XX.

AN UNINVITED WEDDING GUEST.

LIKE an arrow, the launch sped over the sunlit river. The general sat in the bow, his gaze fixed on the flagstaff on the

roof of the bungalow, from which the imperial standard floated in the gentle morning breeze. How many eyes had already spied it? How many willing hands had already seized weapons and awaited only the arrival of their leader to rise and strike?

Norton was intent upon getting the last ounce of power out of the engine. By his side crouched Marie Carlos, her hair whipping about her face, her gown drenched with flying spray. She would not stay behind with Simpkins and his wife to nurse the wounded man; she would go, she cried; her place was with her friends!

Allerton, his face set and grim, his eyes blazing fiercely from their deep sockets, grasped the tiller and directed their course. He had but one thought in his mind—he must reach the church in time to stop that hideous mockery of a wedding.

Either that, or Madge Craig would be a widow before she was a wife—and the blood of Perez would be upon his own head! What mattered the revolution, save as a means to an end? The happiness, the very life of the woman he loved was threatened; and John Allerton cared for nothing else. Civil war? Bah! All his specious arguments melted away before the one burning fact—that, cost what it might, Madge Craig should be saved from the fate which menaced her.

The girl's letter had been incomplete, incoherent; but from the disconnected words of the man, Pedro, the young planter had been able to read between the lines all that she had left unsaid.

She believed him still a prisoner in the black cells, condemned to death when the sun reached the meridian; and she was making the supreme sacrifice a woman can make—marrying a man she hated and despised, on the frail chance of saving the life of the man she loved!

Through Allerton's throbbing brain ran a phrase from a book that had caught and held his attention—"What more can a man do than lay down his life for his friend? Perhaps he can do a little more for a loved woman: marry somebody else." And how much more would Madge Craig do? He ground his teeth.

She should not! He would save her—and then let Perez look to himself! The Chilquitinian had deliberately deceived her as to the time set for the American's execution. Noon, he had told her; and had it not been for Pedro, the fatal shots would have been fired at dawn! She would have sacrificed herself to aid a man who was beyond all earthly help!

How he had misjudged her! Instead of trying to betray him, she had thought to save him from a threatened danger! How could she know that Perez was using her only as a bait to lure his enemy within his grasp? She had sent for him to warn him. And he had believed her disloyal, had condemned her; and, thinking only of his own suffering, had gone away and left her in the power of that fiend!

Suppose Perez had already carried out his plan? Suppose the girl were already his wife? Suppose it was now too late—that even the revolution could not save her? Suppose—and so on, through a maze of hideous visions, that left his brain numb.

"To the left, Jack!" called Norton. "That isn't the landing place. You're going wrong!"

"If we attempt to go through the streets we may be stopped. We're going through the tunnel!" Allerton said between his teeth, as he steered for the spot near the wharf where he had embarked that morning. "Stop the engine—reverse her!"

He ran the nose of the boat deep into the muddy bank, and sprang out. It was the work of but an instant to tear aside the sheltering vines and disclose the mouth of the passageway; and he plunged into the opening without waiting for the others.

Norton turned irresolutely to Marie Carlos. He felt that his place was with his friend, but he could not bring himself to leave the girl who, in these few days, had come to mean so much to him.

"Go on!" she said. "Mr. Allerton will need your help. I will follow you; don't think of me."

The general moved to the tiller.

"And I," he said, "go to my soldiers! May the saints aid you." He started the engine.

Through the darkness of the tunnel, Allerton stumbled forward. He cursed his stupidity in not providing a lantern; but, after Pedro's words, he had paused for nothing, except to snatch a revolver from the table. But he realized that a light might have saved valuable time, and accelerated his progress. He could not see a foot in front of him. Twice he dashed himself against the rough walls, recovered, and rushed on, with bleeding hands.

His soft silk shirt was almost torn from his back; his arms and shoulders were bruised and torn.

Suddenly a dull muffled boom reverberated through the passage, and his heart almost stopped beating. It was the bell in the church tower, tolling the hour of twelve!

As the last stroke died away, he reached the turn in the passage. To the left now! The door! With eager fingers he seized the rusted hasp and pushed against the panels. The door did not give. It was locked on the other side!

With the strength born of desperation, he flung himself against it, and with a crash it flew open, precipitating him on his hands and knees. He struggled to his feet.

In front of him, a narrow, dust-covered staircase wound upward; faint gleams of light filtered down. Pedro had said that this led into the confessional, inside the church itself!

He must observe more caution now; must give no warning of his presence. Behind him he could hear Norton moving forward, feeling his way uncertainly in the gloom.

No time to wait for help—he must go alone! Upward!

He gripped his revolver firmly and dashed up the steps. As the top, a narrow panel blocked his way. He pushed it forward—to the left—to the right; and it slid noiselessly aside. He stepped out, into what appeared a dimly lighted closet.

No, not a closet. Immediately he realized that he was within the confessional. And now a voice came to his ears—a voice so strange, so changed, and yet withal, so familiar, that it seemed to pierce him through and through.

He stretched out his hand and tore aside the curtains. At the foot of the altar steps stood a robed priest, and before him were José Perez and Madge Craig.

CHAPTER XXI.

ONE AGAINST MANY.

"I AM not a Catholic, *padre*," the girl was saying. "I know little of your faith."

"There will be time for all that," interrupted Perez. He put out his hand toward her, but she shrank away, as if it had been a deadly snake. Her face was ghastly pale, expressionless, set in a white, mask-like composure that was more terrible than the wildest grief.

Tall and slim she stood bravely and steadily, facing the fate that would be far worse than death. There was no sign of faltering, of drawing back. She had made her bargain, and she would stand by it, no matter at what frightful cost to herself.

Allerton waited for no more. In two strides he had covered the distance that separated them, and faced the electrified Perez.

"You fiend!" he blazed; and struck the president in the face with his clenched hand.

"*Señor!*" There was horror in the voice of the priest. "This is sacrilege!"

"You are right!" cried Allerton, wheeling upon him. "It is sacrilege! But of not the sort you think and mean. I intend no disrespect to your church, your religion or your person; but I am here to stop this knavery—and stop it I shall!"

"Jack!" said Madge. "Jack!"

Her splendid courage forsook her; she tottered, reeled, and would have fallen had Allerton not put out his arm and caught her. Her head rested on his shoulder, her pale, sweet face was upturned.

On the face of the president a broad red mark appeared and grew. He did not speak, only swallowed once or twice and raised his hand as if to wipe out the deadly insult the mark of those fingers had laid upon him. His hand sought his belt, but he was unarmed. Into his baleful eyes crept a hunted look. He glanced furtively to right and left, licking his dry lips.

Then a slow, sneering smile overspread his face. He looked first at Allerton, then at Norton and Marie Carlos, who had just emerged from the confessional.

"Ah," he said coolly. "So! We are all here. The emperor—the empress!" He bowed ironically. "Royalty has deigned to be present at my wedding. It is well!"

A woman's scream rang through the church, and Marie Carlos, from whose lips it had issued, grasped Norton's arm. Tremblingly she pointed, and all eyes followed the direction of her finger.

The heavy doors at the front had swung noiselessly back; against the light were silhouetted the figures of a group of the soldiers of the republic.

In the breathless hush that followed, the faint, sweet notes of a wild bird perched

on a tree in the Plaza were distinctly audible. Then Perez laughed, a jarring, triumphant laugh, and a little moan of terror broke from Madge Craig.

Allerton's arm tightened about her and she shrank closer to him, her terror-filled eyes roving from the satyr at the foot of the altar steps to those ominous figures in the doorway.

Norton quietly urged Marie back into the shelter of the confessional; shaking, unsteady, with fear she obeyed him.

With a clatter of arms, the soldiers moved down the aisle, led by a gaudily attired sergeant. Perez still laughed.

Allerton's eyes met those of Madge Craig for one fleeting instant. In them he saw and read her desire aright, even before she voiced it.

"Jack!" she breathed. "Kill me! I am not afraid of death. There are far worse things!"

"God bless you, dear!" he said, and bending, kissed her lips. Then he straightened up.

"Halt!" His voice thrilled out clearly. The barrel of his revolver rose until it was on a level with the girl's heart. "President Perez, if your men take another step —I fire!"

The soldiers paused irresolutely. The face of the president went pale with fear. This was turning the tables with a vengeance. Something in the steely glitter of the American's eyes, the grim determination of the lips, told him that the leaden messenger of death would speed on its way should the necessity arise.

The death of Madge Craig was the last thing he desired. He wanted her for himself, loved her, if you will, although the emotion she inspired in him could hardly be catalogued under that name. Rather he desired to possess her, in spite of her obvious hatred of him; and it was no part of his plan that she should escape, either alive or dead.

So he tried to temporize, realizing full well that as surely as he made one treacherous move, Allerton would press the trigger, rather than let the girl fall into his hands again.

"It's of no use, *señor,*" he said, with well-simulated indifference. "We are too many for you. When I give the word a dozen bullets will pierce your heart; there will be no time for you to fire. Surrender —and I will grant you your life."

"No!" burst out Madge wildly. "No!"

Allerton did not move.

"Give orders for your men to retire," he said, "or—take the consequences." He suddenly whipped the revolver around until it covered the president himself. "You've reached the end of your rope," he went on. "If you dare to give any other command, it will be the last word you utter on earth!"

"And that will be the signal for your own death, *señor,*" said the president calmly. He seemed in no hurry to end the scene. Afterward, Allerton wondered why it had been apparent to him that the scoundrel was merely sparring for time.

"I do not see how you could serve the *señorita* after you are dead," Perez went on. "And if I am killed also—the soldiers of the republic are somewhat untutored, *señor;* the *señorita* will have no protector."

"Quick! Slip into the confessional as quietly as you can!" Allerton whispered to Madge. The girl's breath was coming in little gasps; but she turned to obey.

"And you?" she queried.

"I'll follow directly." Allerton felt that if he could but parley for a few moments longer it might be possible to edge near enough to the stairway leading to the underground passage to make a dash for safety.

Imperceptibly, he began to move backward, keeping the distance between himself and Madge the same, that their movements might not be noticed.

"If the *señor* will but be reasonable," went on Perez's oily voice, "there is everything for him to win and nothing to lose if he will but surrender. His estates shall be preserved to him intact; the *señorita*—"

"Jack! Look out! Behind you — the priest! Ah—h—!"

Norton's warning ended in a scream of agony. At the sound of his friend's voice, Allerton wheeled—too late! He had forgotten the *padre.*

Something dark and thick enveloped his shoulders, half stifling him in its close folds. His revolver exploded harmlessly in the air.

He fought like a madman to rid himself of the choking, clinging thing that rendered him blind and helpless; but to no avail.

"Don't shoot him! Take him alive!" shouted Perez; and the words held a sinister meaning. He was to be kept for a worse fate, then!

A dozen hands seized him; in spite of his struggles his arms were pinioned and he was flung backward on the floor, the despairing shriek of Madge Craig ringing in his ears!

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FIGHT AT THE ALTAR.

THAT cry galvanized him into life again. In an instant he was up, struggling desperately against the overwhelming odds. By a miracle, he had succeeded in freeing his head from the suffocating folds of cloth, and he made good use of the respite.

A well directed blow landed squarely on the point of the chin of one of his enemies; the man's head snapped back and he toppled over heavily, involving two of his comrades in his fall.

It gained Allerton a moment's breathing space, but he knew that the end was not far off. He was but one against a dozen; his revolver was gone; he had nothing but his bare fists with which to fight. Yet his indomitable courage did not falter.

His eyes darted anxiously around in search of Madge. Ah—there she was, leaning against one of the pews, and—Perez was going toward her, disregarding the battle that raged at the foot of the altar. He had put out his hand to touch her—

With a snarl of fury, Allerton seized a soldier about the body. Rage lent him superhuman strength. He lifted the man as if he had been a sack of meal, and hurled him through the air like a catapult.

There was a dull thud of impact as the human missile struck its target, and the bodies of the two men crashed to the floor; the president groaned once and rolled over on his face.

Allerton stood at his full height, his head thrown back, his eyes blazing fiercely with the lust of fighting. Disheveled, blood-stained, panting, streaming with sweat, his white shirt rent from throat to waist, with bleeding kunckles, he made a terrifying figure.

The soldiers hung back. Each one shrank from coming within striking distance of those powerful fists. They had thought to win an easy victory; but their quarry, although run to earth, refused to be conquered. They had been ordered to take him alive; but no one of them relished the task.

Had it not been so tragic, there would have been a strong element of the ridiculous in the situation. Here was a single man, almost exhausted by his exertions, his strength sapped by hours of mental agony, yet fighting like a demon and holding a dozen fresh and vigorous assailants at bay. Had they made a concentrated rush, there could have been only one ending; but each was afraid that he would be the next one to get within range of those driving blows, and all hesitated.

Allerton noted their indecision . and laughed harshly. They would take him alive, would they? He called to Madge to run to the passage and then turned to follow.

And then a sudden cry came from Perez, who had regained his feet and now lurched forward, beside himself with pain and rage.

"Shoot him!" he bellowed, fumbling in his belt for the revolver which was not there. "Kill him where he stands!"

This was a different matter; the soldiers did not fear to shoot down an unarmed man. They could take him this way without damage to themselves. Their revolvers clicked.

With a choking cry, Madge Craig rushed forward and flung herself upon Allerton's breast, twining her arms about his neck and shielding him with her own fair body.

"Now, you cowards, fire!" she cried.

"Drag her away!" ordered Perez, stamping his feet in furious anger. The soldiers darted forward. Encumbered as he was, Allerton could make no resistance.

"*Halt!*"

The command rang clarion-like above the uproar. There was a rush of feet down the aisle, the flashing of sunlight on bayonet and gold lace. In a twinkling the soldiers were disarmed; Perez was seized in the grip of a muscular captain.

"What does it all mean?" whispered Madge in bewilderment.

A sudden hush fell. A man had approached them, wearing the uniform of a general of the republic; but on his arm was the imperial insignia. For an instant he looked about with keen, penetrating eyes. Then he dropped on one knee at Allerton's feet.

"Your imperial highness," he said, "I have the honor to report complete success. Chilquitina is ours!"

In the Plaza outside the song of the

bird was suddenly hushed. A great volume of sound rose, swelling louder and louder, in a crescendo of cheers.

"*Long live the emperor! Long live Juan I.*"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE HEAVY CROWN.

"YOU'RE a swell emperor, you are!" jeered Norton, casting a derisive glance at the new ruler of Chilquitina, who lolled at ease in a reclining chair in one of the gorgeously furnished rooms of the palace.

Allerton nodded meditatively.

"So I've been telling myself," he returned. "I know as much about ruling an empire as a cow does about manipulating a Gatling gun; and it will take the dear public just about three days more to find it out, at the end of which time there will be another revolution, and I shall be invited to seek other lodgings. How do you like living in a palace, Ted, the boon companion of his imperial highness, yours truly?"

Norton grinned as broadly as the strips of plaster fastened about his face would allow.

"I'll probably like it better when my bones are whole and I've recovered the skin those rascals scraped off for souvenirs," he answered, with a rueful look at his bandaged left arm, supported by a sling about his neck.

He had been found by the imperial ldiers, unconscious, at the top of the airway leading to the underground passage, where he had bravely made a stand against the adherents of Perez, while Marie Carlos made good her escape.

He had observed the maneuvers of the crafty priest too late to do more than shout a warning to his friend, when he had been attacked and brutally handled by three men, who broke his arm, beat his head and shoulders into a mass of contusions, and left him for dead.

General Zella and the relief force had arrived in the nick of time.

The city had capitulated as one man, and gone over to the imperial standard without the firing of a single shot; and the soldiers who had composed the personal body-guard of the president had been the first to gather in the Plaza and cheer the name of Juan I to the echo.

But the new emperor was far from being satisfied with the way things had turned out. He much preferred being John Allerton of New York, to Juan I of Chilquitina; and there was a discontented look on his face as he leaned back in his chair and made a mental survey of the situation.

Here he was, occupying the very throne which, a few short days before, he had rejected with tolerant contempt. The republic was a thing of the past. Perez had, to quote Ted Norton, been given his choice between languishing in a cell and shaking the dust of the new-made empire from his feet; and, retaining some faint glimmerings of reason, he had chosen the latter course with alacrity, and had departed at once for Europe, a cowed and beaten man.

Madge Craig and Marie Carlos were rapidly recovering from the effects of the terrible mental and physical strain they had undergone, and the brave Chilquitinian, Pedro, was convalescing from his wounds under the skilful ministrations of a Hiltique physician.

Norton's broken arm was knitting nicely; in a few weeks he would be as well and strong as ever.

Even Don Roberto, the malcontent, had paid conciliatory visits, fawned upon the new ruler, and expressed himself as thoroughly satisfied with everything and everybody. And while Allerton did not put very much faith in his protestations of loyalty to the throne, no fault could be found with his attitude, unless, indeed, it smacked too much of servility.

At the *fazenda* things were going smoothly. Simpkins was in charge of an enormous force of men, who were at work repairing the havoc some of their number had undoubtedly been instrumental in bringing about, under the orders of the deposed president.

The dead trees were being replaced by thriving cuttings; all day long wagons loaded with the ripe berries were driven up to the mill, which was running to capacity day and night.

Thousands of sacks of the grayish-green coffee beans of commerce were stacked in the storehouses, or loaded on freighters bound for various trading ports.

John Allerton was in a fair way to retrieve his fortune; he had won the girl he loved, achieved an exalted station in the native land of his forbears; and yet he was not satisfied.

Mrs. Craig, the mother of Madge, was expected back shortly, and he had no very pleasant anticipation of the interview with the lady which must inevitably follow.

That she had poisoned Madge's mind against him and had influenced the girl to break the engagement on the occasion of his visit to Boston, he was sure. But just how far she was culpable in the matter of showing to Perez his letter from Don Roberto, he could not be certain.

True, all the enclosures were in Spanish; but Mrs. Craig was well acquainted with the language; and it scarcely seemed possible that she should have been ignorant of the consequences her delivery of the document to the president would entail.

Had she been a man, Allerton would have known how to deal with her; but since she was a woman, and Madge's mother, the question of what he should do and say gave him much anxiety.

From her directly he had had no word; but Madge was in receipt of several letters, in which the lady reproached herself bitterly for having left her daughter—for having come to Hiltique at all, in fact. And yet she had not hurried back, but had delayed her return on one pretext and another. No wonder Allerton was puzzled and worried, and longed for the mystery to be cleared up.

Another cause of annoyance to him was the amount of pomp and array which attended even his most casual doings. He complained bitterly to Norton that presently his meals would be eaten for him.

Even the general deemed it necessary to address him as "your imperial highness," stand at attention until absolutely commanded to sit, and kiss his hand with elaborate ceremony whenever opportunity offered.

"I'm not the Pope of Rome nor the Queen of England," he told Zella one day in disgust. "I'm an American citizen, and all this hand-kissing and kotowing makes me sick. For Heaven's sake, speak to me as man to man, or not at all!" And sorely distressed, the general tried to carry out the imperial behest.

All of this was very trying to Allerton. He had been accustomed to meeting his friends on a foothold of perfect equality; to do as he pleased, when he pleased. And now, with every motion the subject of comment (and he suspected criticism), with every want provided for, unable to perform the smallest service for himself before half a dozen obsequious flunkeys sprang forward to anticipate him, he chafed at the restrictions with which he was hedged about, and thought longingly of New York and the life awaiting him there.

"I hate this place," he said gloomily to Norton. "I hate the people, the climate, the very stones in the streets. I want to go home where I can turn around without some one trying to help me do it."

"Why don't you go, then?" Norton wanted to know.

"How the deuce can I? Here I'm emperor—I—John Allerton! If I pack up and clear out, what becomes of General Zella and all the people who supported me when I was in trouble? Perez would come back as fast as the steamer would bring him, and the whole circus would start over again.

"No; I can't go now. And the more I look at the prospect, the more hopeless it seems. I don't want to be emperor; I never wanted it. I don't want the throne; I'd like to run away from the whole show and never see it again; but I'm in a cage; and I can't get out."

He got up and took a turn or two about the room. Then he came back and stood in front of Norton.

"I feel like Koko, when he had to cut his own head off," he said. "I've just about cut off mine; at least, I seem to have destroyed my chances of having a happy, comfortable life."

"You remember what Koko did, don't you?" Norton suggested with a yawn. "Can't you find somebody who'll take your job? If I were you, I'd go out and search in the highways and hedges for a volunteer."

Allerton stared at him.

"Do you know, that isn't such a poor idea at that," he said slowly. "I can't get any one to volunteer for the job of emperor, but—by Jove! I've got it! Wait—I'm going to tell Madge!" He hurried from the room, leaving Norton looking after him in astonishment.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A MARRIAGE DEMANDED.

ON this particular day, Allerton, in his character of Juan I, had granted audience to Don Roberto at noon; and punc-

tually on the stroke of twelve the Spaniard was shown in. The emperor rose to greet him, thereby scandalizing the page not a little.

"Good morning," said Allerton, and waved his hand toward a chair.

It was evident that the visitor was somewhat ill at ease, and by the time Allerton had succeeded in making clear the fact that he wished to dispense with red tape and formality, and discuss the matter in hand in merely friendly fashion, he had reduced the *don* to the verge of incoherence.

However, the latter took the bull by the horns, and plunged into the substance of his errand. A little adroit questioning elicited the information that the citizens considered themselves aggrieved.

The revolutionists had "kept their word of promise to the ear, and broken it to the hope." In other words, they had reestablished the empire, but the claims of one of the rightful rulers had been neglected and ignored.

"The citizens feel it their due, your im—Señor Allerton," concluded the *don,* with a glance of trepidation at the impassive face before him, "to receive your assurance that the wedding between you and your royal cousin, the Princess Maria, will immediately take place, and that she will ascend the throne by your side."

Allerton looked at him a long moment before replying.

"Yes?" he said finally. "And how does it come that you, who have always strongly espoused the cause of Miss Carlos, are selected to impart this news to me?"

"Delegations of our most influential citizens have come to me, requesting that I act as spokesman for the city," Roberto answered promptly.

"And what has General Zella to say to all this?" queried Allerton.

Roberto shrugged his shoulders.

"Nothing," he returned coolly. "He can say nothing. He is quite powerless. And unless the Señor Allerton carries out the terms of the original agreement at once, the citizens and soldiers will take matters into their own hands. Even I can do nothing to pacify them."

"I should be willing to wager a small sum that you have not tried very hard," rejoined Allerton dryly. "But you talk of an original agreement. Permit me to remind you that there was none; I absolutely declined to be bound by any arrangement which you might have made for my—or your own—benefit."

The *don* leaned forward impressively.

"Nevertheless, *señor,*" he said, "a proclamation must be issued this day that tomorrow you and the Princess Maria wed!"

"This is nonsense!" said Allerton crisply. "I have no intention of marrying Miss Carlos, nor, to the best of my knowledge and belief, would she be willing to marry me under any circumstances. She is already affianced to my friend, Mr. Norton.

"It appears to me," he went on, with rising anger, "that I have stood just about enough from Chilquitina and her people. Am I emperor—or has every ignorant *peon* in the city the right to dictate to me?"

He stood up and struck the bell sharply. A page entered, and made a deep, polite obeisance.

"Send General Zella to me at once!" Allerton commanded.

He flung himself into his chair and lighted a cigarette. Roberto watched him closely, but made no effort to break the silence.

Presently Norton came into the room, apologized for his intrusion and would have retreated, had not Allerton bade him remain. A moment later and the general entered.

"You sent for me, your—*señor?*" he said.

"I did," returned Allerton curtly.

"Don Roberto informs me that my worthy subjects are disgruntled because Miss Carlos, my cousin, does not share my throne; and if the two branches of the royal house are not at once united in marriage, a demonstration will be made against me.

"I do not know how much of this is true, or how much originated in Don Roberto's brain, which, as we have reason to know, is prolific of ideas. However, it will do no harm to be on the safe side.

"As commander-in-chief of the army, I desire you to take all needful precautions to defend the palace and keep order in the city. I rely upon you to promptly put down any attempted insurrection, and deal summarily with the chief offenders.

"That is all, general. I believe, Don Roberto, there is nothing more to be said. You have my answer."

He rose, as if to indicate that the inter-

view was at an end, and the *don* hastily followed his example.

"Señor Allerton," Roberto said, his eyes glittering with a curious light, "beware how you antagonize the Chilquitinians. A little power is a dangerous thing!"

"Quite so," returned Allerton coolly. "I should advise you to meditate upon that, Don Roberto. And I may add that I am not in the least afraid of you or any of your tools. And should it transpire that you are one of those 'chief offenders,' of whom I have spoken, you will know what to expect. I have not forgotten a certain threat you made against me on the occasion of our first interview.

"Ah—Mrs. Craig! You wished to see me?"

The curtains had been pushed aside, and a tall, gray-haired woman of imposing appearance was standing in the doorway.

Her arm outstretched, she pointed an accusing finger at Roberto.

"He is the man who betrayed you all?" she cried. "He told me to take those letters to Perez!"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE EMPEROR MOVES.

WITH a snarl of rage, Roberto raised his fist as if to fell the woman to the ground, but the general's sword flashed out, and he shrank back.

"It is true!" Mrs. Craig went on excitedly. "I have just seen my daughter, and learned all that has happened since I left here. A man brought that unlucky package of papers to me in Boston, and as I did not know where to find you, Mr. Allerton, I decided to take them at once to the writer, in Hiltique, as I knew they were of great value and importance.

"I sent Madge on ahead, and went to the house of Don Roberto the instant I landed in Puerto Manuel. He told me that President Perez was the person to see, and advised me to take the letters to him at once."

It was impossible for the hearers to doubt the truth of this extraordinary story. Guilt was stamped all over the *don's* livid face.

"So!" the general said, in measured tones, "you are the traitor! You thought to inform Perez of our plans and ingratiate yourself with him, after Miss Carlos had refused to be a party to your scoundrelism, and had fled your house!

"You thought to ruin Señor Allerton and me—to have us both put to death—in order to further your own ends! Dog! I could kill you where you stand!"

The tense hush was broken by the voice of Madge Craig, who had entered the room unobserved. She made her way to Allerton's side, and handed him a folded paper, embossed with a great gold seal, representing a condor with outspread wings.

"A messenger brought it," she explained. "He wanted to see you, but they would not let him in. He is a foreigner, and I think the captain feared treachery. But I told him I would see that you had it at once.

Allerton thanked her, broke the seal and gave a quick glance at the contents of the document. A look of mingled surprise and relief crept slowly over his face.

He stood gazing about him at the strange scene, his eyes wandering from the accusing figures of Mrs. Craig and the general to the *don*, cowering, almost abject in his fear, then to the long official paper Madge had brought in.

"Your imperial highness," whined Roberto, "it is false! I—"

"Silence!" thundered the general.

Allerton took a step forward.

"General Zella," he said quietly, "you will see that this man leaves the city and the State in twenty-four hours. Should he attempt to return, we shall deal more harshly with him."

"Banishment!" here moaned the *don*. "Your—"

"That is all, general," Allerton interrupted. "You will immediately deliver him to a subordinate, who can be trusted to see that my command is carried out.

"It is," he added, as the general promptly executed the order and returned to the room, "the last I shall issue as Emperor of Chilquitina! The Northern republic has extended her boundary line again!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

BACK TO MINE OWN PEOPLE.

ON the deck of the steamer a little group of Americans clustered near the rail, gazed down at a launch, from which General Zella and Simpkins called back

farewells and good-wishes across a widening stretch of water.

"Be sure, *señor*, that I shall serve your interests faithfully," the general assured Allerton for the twentieth time.

On the wharf, a company of soldiers of the Northern republic stood at attention, the sun glinting on the brave silver lace that decked their dark green uniforms. They were watching the departure of the late emperor and his friends, and incidentally, awaiting the landing of Zella, once general of the imperial forces, now governor of the State of Chilquitina, province of the Northern republic.

Allerton's prophecy had been fulfilled almost to the letter. Scarcely had the restoration of the empire been an accomplished fact, when emissaries had arrived, bearing official documents which stated that the Northern republic refused to recognize the imperial government, and that its establishment constituted a breach of the agreement existing between the two States.

The Northern republic, therefore, called upon the *soi disant* emperor to abdicate peaceably; otherwise the demand would be carried out by force of arms. The whole of Chilquitina was to be absorbed as a province of its powerful neighbor.

John Allerton was appointed governor, subject only to certain minor restrictions, and answerable to the president of the larger state; and in case he did not care to serve in this capacity, power to name his own successor was granted him.

This was done, said the communications, in view of the fact that Mr. Allerton was not without some rights in the matter, by reason of his lineage, and because his heavy interests were justly entitled to conservation.

His services in the deposing of the ex-president, José Perez, were recognized by permission to retain title to, and cultivate, his estates.

This, and much more, which amounted substantially to a proclamation that Chilquitina had been a thorn in the side of the Northern republic long enough; and the latter felt the time ripe to absorb the smaller country.

Allerton had no thought of combating the decree. He had had enough of Chilquitina. Since the last thing he desired was to remain in Hiltique, he appointed General Zella to the post of governor; and, waiting only long enough to have the appointment ratified, and settle affairs at the *fazenda*, he made his arrangements to leave for the United States.

The interview with Mrs. Craig had proved less unpleasant than he had anticipated. That lady had decided that a frank statement of her attitude was the best and, indeed, the only way, to help her cause; and she had thrown herself on his mercy.

She had, she confessed, done her best to influence Madge against him at the crisis in his financial affairs; and had succeeded in her object. The discovery of the fact that he was in a fair way to become Emperor of Chilquitina had, however, put a different face on the matter, and she had hurried her daughter to Hiltique with a view to smoothing things over.

Her delivery of the conspirators' letter to Perez, had, as she said, been innocent enough, and had been inspired by Roberto, who saw in her a means by which he could remove Allerton and General Zella from his path, earn the gratitude of the rascally president, and open the way to vast benefits from the State.

Once Mrs. Craig learned of the catastrophe her act had so nearly precipitated, she had been afraid to return until affairs had assumed a more promising aspect.

Allerton had no desire to quarrel with her. He reasoned that the past was done with, and nothing was to be gained by withholding his pardon. It would make Madge unhappy; and, after all, there are many cowardly and mercenary women in the world. Mrs. Craig had but acted according to her lights, and he felt that he could not blame her more than any other woman of her set, who, if placed in a similar position, would have done as she did.

And he was far too happy to bear malice toward any one.

The only one who was not satisfied was, perhaps, General Zella. He grieved that his beloved country should lose her identity; but his sorrow was somewhat assuaged by the realization that the United States would probably interfere, on the ground that the Northern republic had infringed upon the Monroe Doctrine; and in the meantime, that, as the head and front of her affairs, he himself would be able to direct her to a happier destiny and foster a prosperity which had been far from being hers in the past.

The last farewells were called from the vessel's deck, and the craft steamed slowly down the river and out onto the placid bosom of the bay.

Norton's hand sought for and clasped that of Marie Carlos. She looked up at him with a shy smile. It was quite easy to see that England had lost one of her fair daughters to Uncle Sam.

The sun dipped below the western horizon, and the sky was tinted with all the gloriously golden hues of the early tropical twilight.

Mrs. Craig shivered in the cooling air and went below. The deck was deserted, save for the two couples at the rail. Presently Norton and Marie strolled away, but the other two did not move.

They were gazing at the purple mountains that towered behind the city, but their thoughts were not of the country they had so lately left. They did not see the splendor of the western sky. Forgotten were all the suffering and pain they had borne, forgotten the doubts and fears which had beset them.

Their faces were turned to the north, to the city of their birth; and hand in hand they looked forward to the future, the time of their life and love together.

(The end.)

"Stung!"

By Alfred Rossiter

SILAS FLINT, better known in Wall Street as "Old King Coal," was stamping up and down his drawing-room like a maddened bull.

Each time he passed the capacious armchair whence his daughter Polly was watching him with demure interest, he gave an indignant snort; and each time he came opposite young Preston Wallace, who was standing rigidly upright at the other end of the room, he let out a roar of abuse.

His little blue eyes flashed wickedly, and his fat, red neck seemed to swell up and quiver with each fresh outburst.

The slender, gray-eyed youth, whose firm mouth offset the impression of effeminacy conveyed by his somewhat delicately molded features, formed a sharp contrast, as he quietly replied to the irate banker's last sally.

"I'm sorry if you are displeased, Mr. Flint, but I had no choice. It was very kind of you to get me the position with Winning, Bothways & Co., but since I found out about their share in that Coalville and Steelton deal I simply had to resign. I've been brought up to believe that right is might and not *vice versa,* and so I'll have to find another job; that's all."

There was just a trace of conscious righteousness in his tone; but Polly Flint's dainty

ears failed to detect it, or perhaps she considered it negligible, for the look of admiration and pride with which she regarded him from across the room showed plainly that to her he seemed a second Sir Galahad.

Not so to her father.

"You bet you can hunt another job," he shouted, "and another girl, too."

He waved their double exclamation of protest aside with a heavy hand.

"I don't want any parsons in my family. What's honest enough for me and my friends has got to be honest enough for you. In Wall Street it's every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost. Might is right every time, and it's the only way to win out.

"People don't hand you their money if you preach at them. Drive 'em into a corner and take it away from 'em, or you'll never get it. You'll never make any money with your notions, and you'll not marry Polly until you can blame well afford it."

The outraged, crimson-faced financier bolted from the room and slammed the door behind him, drowning his daughter's wail and her suitor's more forcible exclamation.

For a blank half-minute the two young people looked at each other in dismay. Then Wallace crossed over to where Polly was now dismally huddled in her armchair and, placing a hand under her pretty chin, turned up her face and kissed her with great thoroughness and fervor. This procedure must have had a decidedly stimulating effect, for presently the girl smiled at him and said:

"Gee, wasn't father mad!"

"Well, rather," agreed her lover.

Another pause — more kisses. Finally Polly regretfully freed herself and pushed Preston toward a chair.

"Now, sit down over there like a good boy, and tell me how it all happened—right from the beginning."

He sank into the chair with a sigh of resignation.

"Well," he began, "it was this way. You know I was tickled to death when your father got me that job as secretary to Mr. Winning. Thought it was great to get into a big office like theirs.

"Of course, if I had known more about their methods, I'd have refused the position. I may be somewhat strait-laced for Wall-Street notions." Preston's features again assumed a self-satisfied expression. "But that's the way I was brought up, and I mean to stick by it.

"Naturally, during the three months I've been with them I've heard plenty of rumors, but I never noticed anything in the office that seemed wrong. Now, lately the papers were full of the C. and I. merger, and your father's firm, as well as Winning, Bothways & Co., were charged with having done a lot of funny business.

"You know, dearest," added Wallace hastily, "that I respect your father highly as a man, though we never did agree about business ethics."

"Oh, that's all right," said Polly, who had long since concluded that the newspapers gave pretty accurate accounts of her sire's financial acrobatics. "I understand all that. Go on with your story."

The boy looked longingly at the piquant face, but her expression of stern determination showed him that it was useless to attempt a sally before his report had been duly concluded.

Polly on her part knew very well that it would be no easy task to win back her father's consent to their betrothal, and thus she was eager to hear the full extent of the mischief.

So young Wallace took up his recital.

"Of course, I always stood up for the firm when any of the fellows spoke disparagingly of it, because I couldn't believe that any—er—gentlemen would do business in that manner. This afternoon, however, I accidentally had positive proof that these rumors are only too true.

"Some papers had fallen on the floor of Mr. Winning's private office, and I was under the table trying to gather them up, so that, I suppose, he did not know I was there. I heard him call your father on the private wire, and they had a bit of a fuss about that very 'merger agreement,' the existence of which they have both been indignantly denying in the newspapers. Winning was vexed because your father could not promise to have it complete before to-morrow.

"It seems he needs one more signature—that of Lawrence Peet, the Pittsburgh coal-mine magnate. Mr. Flint is to meet 'Merger Peet' at lunch to-morrow, and he expects to get his signature then. He thought it inadvisable to seem too eager by pressing him for it, while Mr. Winning wanted him to try to force the deal to a close to-day.

"Finally they agreed that it would be wiser to go easy, and your father is to send the paper over to Winning, Bothways & Co.'s office to-morrow at three o'clock.

"I was so shocked, Polly, to hear that they

had, after all, been back of that stock-jobbing deal that I forgot myself so far as to just stay there and listen. It honestly never occurred to me to leave the room when I realized that Mr. Winning didn't know I was there.

"But, as long as I had heard, I felt that I couldn't stay with a house that did that sort of thing, and I crawled out and told Mr. Winning right then and there that, while of course he might rely on my discretion in the matter, I would request him to accept my resignation at once."

Young Wallace paused, having delivered himself with the prim emphasis of a martyr relating the tale of a sacrifice nobly brought.

Polly gazed at him a trifle doubtfully. Then she asked:

"What did old Winning have to say?"

Preston fidgeted uneasily in his chair.

"Oh, first he looked black as thunder when he found that I'd been in the room while he spoke about that trust agreement; but when he heard me out he—a—um—oh, well, he laughed like an idiot.

"I came here to-night with the intention of telling your father the reason for my sudden resignation, but evidently Mr. Winning had already telephoned him about it."

Polly thought hard for a few minutes; then she said:

"Naturally, you couldn't have acted differently with your nice, clean notions, you dear boy. But you can't blame dad from his point of view for being good and mad. The question is, what are you going to do about it?"

Preston gazed fixedly and rather helplessly at the ceiling for several pensive moments. Then he delivered himself of the fruits of his deliberation with admirable terseness.

"Hunt another job."

"Oh, I know that," snapped Polly impatiently, "but how are you going to go at it? You know it's not easy to find a position that will pay as well as the one you gave up, and only last week I heard father say that everybody in the 'Street' was discharging employees on account of the general business depression. And I'd so love to see you get a nice place with some good firm—if only to prove to dad that we can manage perfectly well without his help."

"You bet we'll show him," cried the boy, his gray eyes lighting up with enthusiasm. "I'll show him that one can get along without resorting to trickery if I have to get a start by running a peanut-stand. What gets me so mad is that your father doesn't seem to realize how easily one can make money by using shady methods.

"Now, I suppose I could any time get a good-sized check from Winning, Bothways & Co.'s competitors by selling some of the information I picked up in the office, and no one would think any the worse of me for it. No doubt your father thinks it's ignorance that keeps me from doing it, and he doesn't understand that it goes against my standards.

"Gee, how I wish I could make him see that it isn't any lack of smartness on my part. Oh—"

Preston stopped abruptly, with eyes half shut and mouth open, as if he had been suddenly petrified.

The girl laughed at his queer expression.

"What on earth is the matter with you?" she demanded. "You look like Lot's wife."

Wallace straightened up in his chair and shook himself like a man awakening from a trance.

"Polly," he began solemnly, "I have a plan — a plan that's a peach — a veritable mastodon."

"Good for you! What is it?"

"I'll only tell you on one condition," countered the boy, conscious of holding the upper hand.

"And what may that be?"

Miss Flint's jolly brown eyes were twinkling expectantly.

"You must sit with me in this chair, so that I can whisper my plot into your dear old ear."

The girl threw up her hands in mock horror—then dropped them with a gesture of resignation.

"Oh, well, if I must, I suppose I must."

Having disposed themselves in the desired juxtaposition, the council of war proceeded, interrupted only by such rather frequent exchanges of mutual esteem as might be expected under the circumstances.

Shortly after three o'clock the next afternoon Old King Coal's private office was in an uproar.

John Haggerty, the little gray Irishman who had been Flint's confidential messenger for thirty years, stood in the middle of the room, pale and trembling and almost on the verge of tears, while the capitalist was vainly searching his soul for curses with which to adequately express his feelings.

And while John was stuttering explanations and Flint breaking in on him with angry denunciation, the private telephone from Winning, Bothways & Co.'s office kept on ringing.

From time to time Old King Coal took up the instrument, bawled some vicious imprecation at Winning, frantically clamoring at the other end, and slammed the receiver back on the hook.

"Honestly, Mr. Flint, sir," ventured the palsied messenger, availing himself of a lull in the storm, "honestly it wasn't my fault. The moment I stepped into the main office, young Mr. Wallace came up to me and almost tore the envelope from my hand, said I was late, and that Mr. Winning was waiting to take it to the vault himself to lock it away.

"I didn't know that he wasn't working for them any more—and it all happened so quick I hadn't time to say a word. He went right into Mr. Winning's private office, too, so I never suspected anything wrong until I got back here and Mr. Winning telephoned you to find out why I hadn't brought it over. Sure, sir, nobody would have expected Mr. Wallace to do a thing like that."

Even the enraged financier had to admit the justice of this last remark. Nobody—least of all the financier himself — would have given Preston Wallace credit for this bold piece of robbery. He dismissed the relieved Haggerty with a growl, and sat down at his desk to think the situation over.

The loss of the "merger agreement" had come so suddenly that he felt dazed and bewildered. The publication of that slip of paper might involve him and his coterie in serious difficulties and cost him a couple of million dollars in the bargain. It was no joke to know that the young man whom he had insulted the previous evening had it in his possession. It was evident that, in order to get even, young Wallace wanted to show him up.

Flint's neck bulged purple, and he furiously batted his little pig's eyes as he realized his helplessness. He couldn't risk invoking the aid of a detective bureau, as he could not reveal the nature of the lost contract.

Moreover, it was likely that Preston would put his revenge into execution without much delay. Perhaps he had already taken the agreement to the secretary of the stock exchange. Old King Coal gnashed his teeth in impotent fury.

John Haggerty was right. Who would ever have credited this stripling, with his apparently painfully correct code of ethics, with a trick of this nature? And the coolness of the young rascal!

The trust magnate had gathered from Winning's incoherent report over the wire that Preston had come into his private room —no doubt to lull any possible suspicions of Haggerty's or the clerk's in the office—and had handed him an extra desk key, explaining that he had forgotten to turn it in the day before. Then he had politely bidden him "good afternoon," and had sedately walked out of the office.

Flint, himself a grim old pirate, couldn't suppress a grunt of appreciation, even while he wiped the perspiration from his incandescent brow. There seemed nothing to be done until something happened to indicate what use Preston had made of the paper.

It was maddening! He glanced at the clock on his desk. Only half an hour had passed since the discovery of the robbery—it had seemed like half a century to the disturbed banker.

Just then the telephone rang briskly. Flint growled with disgust at the way it made him jump. He was not ordinarily given to "nerves." He snatched the receiver to his ear:

"Who wants me?" he demanded of the operator.

"Mr. Preston Wallace says he'd—"

"Put him on, quick!"

"Hallo, Preston, that you?"

The old fox spoke in the sugared accents of a mother of seven homely daughters introducing her thirty-year-old first-born to an eligible millionaire.

"Yes, sir." There was a trace of surprise in the young fellow's voice.

He had expected a cyclone.

"How are you making out?" went on the financier genially. "Any prospect for a job yet? Perhaps I can do something for you. You know I wasn't serious in what I said last night."

Wallace laughed. He remembered only too well the capitalist's remarks of the previous evening.

"Never mind about that just now, Mr. Flint," he said, and the older man was astonished at the crispness of the usually diffident voice. "I want to say a few words about this little paper you were kind enough to send me by John Haggerty."

Old King Coal forced a sour cackle.

"Oh, that was quite a good joke of yours. But it's lucky that the paper was of no great importance, else we might have been quite upset about it. Winning and I simply roared at Haggerty's discomfiture. Awfully funny. By the way, I wish you'd bring it round to the house to-night, so that I can return it in the morning. Winning may want it for his records. Better come up for dinner, Preston. I want—"

"Now look here, Mr. Flint," cut in the younger man, "I'm not the fool you think I am, and I have no time to waste. I perfectly realize the value of this document; and if you want to risk it, I'll define it for you right now over the phone. At any rate, I know that your competitors value it, if you don't. Now, how about it?"

Old Flint gasped with suppressed rage. This surely was a day of revelations. He had never suspected that Wallace would know enough to take this tack. But no one knew better than he just when a bluff had outlived its usefulness. When he spoke again there was no longer any suavity in his tone.

"Well, what do you want?"

Preston's answer came without hesitation.

"Your written consent to Polly's marriage to me and a certified check for one hundred thousand dollars."

"Why, you infernal blackmailer, what do you think I am?" Old King Coal's fury overflowed its ever-precarious bounds. "Is that the way for a gentleman to act? I'll have you arrested! I'll hound you out of town! I'll—"

"That's enough, Mr. Flint. You know, I am sure, that might is right. In Wall Street it's every man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost. People don't hand out their money if one preaches at them—one minute, please; I'm not through yet—one must drive 'em in a corner and take it away from 'em. You see, I've recognized the wisdom of your teaching and chucked my Sunday-school notions."

At this point the harassed trust magnate, goaded past all restraint by Preston's cool insolence, broke loose like a powder-plant gone on a rampage and flooded his tormentor with tidal waves of exuberant profanity.

Young Wallace waited for him to stop for breath.

"If you use just one more word of abuse," he declared then, "I'll hang up the receiver. There is no use arguing. You know what it means if I turn this paper over to your competitors, or to the stock exchange, or to a newspaper. I give you my word that I'll do one of these things unless I have your promise that I can call for the letter and the check at your office within thirty minutes. That's final."

Old King Coal realized that it was. For a full minute he thought with all the intensity of his powerful brain. There was no way out.

"You know that it is past three o'clock and the banks are closed. I can't get a check certified."

Perhaps he could win a delay. But the boy was not so easily taken in. His experience at Winning, Bothways & Co.'s office had taught him what a big concern can accomplish in case of necessity.

"Maybe others couldn't," he replied firmly. "Flint & Co. can. The tellers are still at the banks. Do you agree, or don't you? I'm in a hurry. Yes or no?"

Flint knew he was licked.

"Come in in half an hour and be—"

"Very well, thank you ever so much," interrupted Wallace, and hung up the receiver.

Thirty minutes later he jauntily stepped into Mr. Silas Flint's private office with a triumphant smile, which even his most strenuous endeavors to appear nonchalant could not drive from his lips.

The financier glanced up at him with an acrid gleam in his little blue eyes.

"Where's the trust agreement?" he snarled.

"First I'd like to see the letter and the check, if you don't mind."

Without further parley, Old King Coal took the documents out of a drawer of his desk and extended them to Preston, keeping tight hold, however, on one corner of each.

The boy flushed hotly at this precaution, but suppressed an angry protest at the recollection of his purloining of the merger contract. A joyful grin spread over his face as he read that, "on consideration, Mr. Flint had permanently withdrawn all and any objections to the marriage of his daughter Polly to Mr. Preston Wallace."

Having assured himself that the letter was properly signed, he gave his attention to a careful scrutiny of the check. This also turned out to be perfectly satisfactory, a certified order to pay him one hundred thousand dollars on demand.

He drew the trust agreement from his pocket, and the two financial buccaneers guardedly exchanged papers.

The older man, quite overcome by the contemplation of his defeat at the hands of this youngster, went silently across the room and locked up the recovered document in the safe. Then he went back to his desk and sat down. Preston was still standing in the same place, looking at his check and letter rather wistfully.

"Well," snapped the banker, looking up and regaining without much effort his customary gruffness, "what are you hanging round here for?"

The boy looked absently at him for a moment. Then, with a sudden start, he stepped close up to the desk.

"Mr. Flint," he said with perhaps pardonable unctuousness, "I have something to say to you. I made up my mind last night to show you how easy it is to make money when one is willing to substitute might for right. I think you will agree I have proved my point. But there is something else I wish to establish to your satisfaction and my own. That is, the innate squareness of human nature, which you would have me think is a myth.

"Now, Mr. Flint, I want to put myself entirely into your hands. I don't want this letter which I forced from you — nor the money.

"I'm sure that now you'll not withhold your consent to our marriage, and I merely want you to obtain for me a chance at an honest job where I can win recognition by hard work. And here is the proof of my faith in your generosity."

Preston tore the letter and the check into a handful of shreds and threw them into the waste-basket.

Then, with a charming, boyish smile, he held out his hand to the financier.

"Let's be friends," he said simply.

Old King Coal had stared at him in blank amazement for a moment as he tore up the papers—then he abruptly rose from his chair.

"You blithering jackass!" he roared, grasping the dumfounded youth by the collar and rushing him toward the door. "You hopeless young idiot! You unmitigated fool! Here I was just beginning to think you had some common sense, and now you turn out to be nothing but a highfalutin bonehead, after all."

And the office door closed with a crash behind the flying form of poor Sir Galahad.

"The Diamond Kid"

By *William Heyliger*

JOHN ANDERSON made a boast of it. He never denied his wife anything.

"She can have what she wants," he told the cronies he met each night at Reilly's. "If she wanted the north pole, I'd buy it for her. And yet she isn't satisfied."

"Women are never satisfied," all the cronies said.

"You fellows know I'm a good spender," said Anderson.

"You are for a fact, John."

"Why, she's got more diamonds than any other woman on the block."

"You're the diamond kid, John," the

cronies agreed, and then they sang their favorite ode to Mr. Anderson:

For he's a jolly good fellow,
For he's a jolly good fellow,
For he's a jolly good fellow,
Whi—ch nobody can dee—ny.

So it came to pass that Mr. Anderson, going home rather late each night, came to believe that he was abused.

This particular night it was burningly hot. The puffs of wind that came from the river were like furnace-blasts. Two days before the baby had taken a fever.

"A dose of castor-oil, and she'll be all right," John Anderson had said. That morning, however, he had telephoned for the doctor.

When Mr. Anderson swung off his car at the corner, he had resolved to go straight home. His throat was parched, but he walked past Reilly's. He'd go up and see how the baby was, and then he'd come down for a drink. He hadn't gone fifty feet past the corner when the summer swinging-doors parted, and a head peered through.

"Hi! there, John!"

Mr. Anderson hesitated, turned, and came back.

"Kid's sick, Ed," he said. "I'll run up to the house first."

"Nothing could happen to that kid, John. It's chunky as a horse. Good, healthy kid. Come on. Just one on me."

"In a minute, Ed. I'll just run up—"

"Oh, be a sport," insisted Ed. "Just one."

"Well, just one," said Mr. Anderson, and a woman watching from a window across the way stood up, sighed, and went back to fanning a fever-racked, wailing baby.

"Ma-ma's ba-by, ma-ma's ba-by," she crooned.

Over in Reilly's, within a half-hour, the sick baby fled completely from Mr. Anderson's mind. The cronies—they called themselves Reilly's Guards—were beginning to gather. Finally one asked:

"How's the kid, John? My wife said she saw the doctor there to-day."

"Just a little fever," said Mr. Anderson. "Guess I'll run across and see how it is."

As nobody insisted that he stay, Mr. Anderson made his exit. But the crowd called:

"Coming back, John?"

"Couldn't keep me away with a team of horses," said Mr. Anderson.

As he opened the door of the flat and entered the kitchen, the heat of the rooms struck him as insufferable. His wife was in the parlor patiently fanning the baby.

"What did the doctor say, Sarah?" he asked.

"Summer complaint. He'll be here again."

The woman started to cry silently. The man put an unsteady hand on the baby's forehead.

"She isn't very hot," he said impatiently. "Stop your crying. Chances are the doctor's trying to work in a bunch of visits. It's hot!"

The room was silent save for the fretful whine of the baby and the swish of the fan. The man dropped into a chair. The stillness annoyed him.

"Well?" he demanded. "What are you so quiet about? What's wrong to-night?"

"Nothing."

"There you go again—nothing. Every night it's the same story. A sour face, and —nothing. Don't you get more money to spend than any woman you know? Here, want some money? How much — ten, twenty, thirty? If I gave you one thousand you wouldn't be satisfied."

"No," she said passionately. "I wouldn't be satisfied. I want more than money."

"Don't I give you diamonds and clothes? You're the best dressed woman round here. What else do you want?"

"You."

It was years since she had argued this way with him. He couldn't understand the change. He was used to having her take his fits of ill-temper in silence.

"So that's it, eh?" he asked. "Kicking because I go out now and then—"

"Now and then?"

"Well, I'm only across the street. You can look out the window any time and see me. And I come home—"

"When Reilly's closes," she finished quietly.

"You're never satisfied," he grumbled. "What's come over you to-night? Money, jewels, clothes. What more do you want? Can't a man go out for recreation of an evening? Don't I have to work all day?"

"You worked all day when you first knew me," she said, with a catch in her voice. "You could stay with me then in the evenings. We dreamed together—and they haven't come true. You throw me money. Did I marry you for money?

"I'd sooner be in a hut and have you the John Anderson I first knew, than have you what you've been for five years and me in a palace. I don't know why I feel this way to-night. I guess it's because the baby's sick."

Something within him stirred—some little spark that had not yet been drowned out. He put out his hand and touched her hair.

"Don't do that, Sarah," he said gruffly.

She caught his hand.

"John, I'm afraid. I'm afraid the baby's going to—"

"Stop! It's only a fever. She's not as sick as that."

"I want you to stay in to-night. Just to-night. I'm afraid, John."

"I'll stay," he promised.

He could see into Reilly's—see the end of the bar. Two men stood there with long, cool steins in front of them.

"It'll take about a dozen to take this thirst," he growled, and then remembered his promise.

"The kid isn't very sick," he argued. "That doctor's crazy or faking."

When the meal was ready he ate hurriedly, and came back to the parlor. The baby's cries got on his nerves. From Reilly's came a snatch of care-free song. His throat felt as though somebody was singeing it with a torch. It was getting hotter.

The mantel clock ticked away. The baby's cries finally ceased. His wife stirred in a hushed whisper.

"She's asleep."

"Good!" He stood up a little nervously. "I'll have time to get just one drink and—and then I'll hurry back, if she's asleep."

In the darkness he felt the woman straighten.

"You promised, John. Just to-night."

"But she's asleep. That's a good sign. I'll be right back."

"The doctor's coming—"

"I'll be right back. You can watch me from the window."

Suddenly she bent down and laid her head against the baby's hot cheek. At last she spoke, and he scarcely heard her voice:

"Even the child can't hold you."

Mumbling to himself he walked through the rooms. Habit was calling its slave. At the kitchen door he hesitated a moment. He felt a momentary sense of shame.

He told himself that the baby wasn't as sick as they thought, that he'd only take one drink, and that he'd be back before the doctor arrived. He stepped out into the hall and closed the door.

From the window Mrs. Anderson saw him cross the street, a brave figure of a man. Then she waited. A half-hour passed; an hour. The baby moaned, and she picked it up and hugged it to her breast.

"Baby! Baby!" she cried. "You're all I've got!"

The moans ceased. Suddenly a fear gripped the mother. Then footsteps sounded on the stairs. She laid down the baby and ran to the kitchen door.

"I'm afraid, doctor," she shuddered, and motioned inside.

She locked and unlocked the door, and waited with twitching fingers, afraid to go in. In a little while she heard the doctor coming through the rooms. She started forward.

"Doctor—"

He laid gentle hands on her shoulders.

"Poor little woman," he said. "Your baby has—gone home."

Long afterward she crept into the parlor, and dropped into the chair at the window. She could see into Reilly's.

There was her husband, care-free, and men were round him with upraised glasses. They were singing:

> For he's a jolly good fellow,
> For he's a jolly good fellow,
> For he's a jolly good fellow—

Her head fell forward on her arms, and she sobbed. She did not hear the joyously shouted closing line:

> Which nobody can dee—ny.

DIRCE.

STAND close round, ye Stygian set,
With Dirce in one boat conveyed,
Or Charon, seeing, may forget
That he is old, and she a shade.

Walter Savage Landor.

WHAT ONE WOMAN LEARNED

By Inez Baron

"YOU mean it?"

"I do."

For a moment, Alton stood looking at Madge Blair half doubtfully. Then, as if convinced against his will by the determined expression on her face, he picked up his hat and gloves and turned toward the door.

"I'm sorry, Madge," he said simply.

The girl's face softened.

"And I'm sorry, too, Jack," she said impulsively. "But you don't understand. I *can't* marry you. I like you—"

"Only like me, Madge?"

"Only like you. But if things were different—if *you* were different—I might give you another answer. But I can't marry a man I don't respect. Oh, I don't exactly mean I don't respect you; I do, in a way, but not in the way I ought. I don't feel toward you as I want to feel toward the man I marry.

"You know, Jack," she continued, sinking into a chair before the fire and propping her chin in the palms of her hands, "you've never done anything worth while. It may not be altogether your fault; I don't want to judge you. You've never had any real incentive. You have always been so, ever since I've known you, and—"

"I haven't loafed, Madge, Heaven knows. Ever since I left college, I've done my share of work, I think," Alton interposed reproachfully.

The girl made a gesture of impatience.

"Oh, I know; you've worked, of course. But what has it all amounted to? What have you done? Just piled up more dollars on those your father left you. Mere money-getting. Any one can make money. It isn't even as if you'd gone to work and carved out a place for yourself.

"You've had the great organization your father built up to help you. All you've had to do was to see that his investments were looked after. You've profited by his toil, his ability. You've made money, of course. But it's no credit to you. It would have been to your discredit if you hadn't.

"Your great trouble is that you dabble. You played at painting until it bored you; you tried music, until you grew tired of it. You went in for writing, until you discovered something else you liked better.

"But you never painted a beautiful picture, composed a good song, or wrote a

line of any lasting merit. You're just a dabbler, Jack, never true to anything for any length of time, never sticking to anything longer than you find amusement in it. It's the fad of the moment that holds you."

"You're unjust, Madge!" cried Alton hotly. "There may be a little truth in what you say, but you aren't fair. Perhaps I don't stick very long to anything; perhaps I do dabble. But my love for you is no mere 'fad of a moment.' It's big and strong and true; it's grown to be part of me. I can't put it all aside and go on just being friends, as you ask. It's got to be all or nothing. Madge!"

He came closer to her, leaning over the back of her chair, one hand resting lightly on her shoulder.

"Give me a chance," he begged. "Say yes. Say you'll marry me, and I'll—I'll do anything you say. I can make you happy, Madge. I know I can, if you'll only let me try. Maybe I'm not such a poor specimen as you think. I'll admit that I'm no painter, musician or writer.

"I tried these things because I wanted to please you; but when I found I couldn't make good at them, I dropped them. But I didn't do it because they ceased to amuse me; it was because I thought it would be a waste of time to persist in trying to do something for which I had no natural talent.

"All these things are gifts. I'm not gifted that way. The only thing I'm good for is business, and I've been trying to carry on the dear old dad's work from the place where he left off two days before he died. He wanted me to, and I've tried to carry out his wishes.

"I haven't altogether failed; any one will tell you that. I'm no genius. I'm a very ordinary sort of chap. But if you could just care for me a little—just let me show you how much I care for you, and how hard I'll try to make you happy and comfortable—if you just wouldn't insist on my having another kind of brains than the ones I was born with."

She shook her head, keeping her eyes resolutely fixed on the glowing logs in the grate, not daring to look up into his pleading dark eyes, lest her resolution should waver.

"I've given you my answer, Jack," she said softly. "I must be able to look up to the man I marry, be proud of him. When you have done something yourself, on your own initiative, something that does not depend upon what your father accomplished, then come to me."

She rose as she spoke and held out her hands. Alton took them both in his, as she went on:

"You say you love me. Prove it, then, by doing something worth while, by making something of yourself and using the brains you have. You're letting them lie idle. When you have done this—come back."

It seemed hopeless, useless to say more; but Alton felt that he could not give up.

"Is that any reason why we couldn't be happy together, Madge?" he asked. "Aren't you mistaking the illusion for the real? My work may be prosaic, but it's work, all the same, and my brains, such as they are, don't lie idle. Why can't you marry me and let me go on? You can do as you like, potter and mess in clay to your heart's—"

"You call my art 'pottering and messing in clay'!" she cried resentfully, sitting up straight in her chair, and half turning to face him. "You don't understand; it's not in you. You want me to marry you, to be with you always, the while you are taking an attitude of resigned toleration toward my life-work."

Alton tried to repress a smile. To hear this girl of twenty talking about her "life-work" was mildly amusing. But she was terribly in earnest, and her eyes flashed angrily as she saw the faint humorous curve of his mouth.

"I won't be laughed at!" she exclaimed. "How dare you laugh at me? Is there nothing in the world but dollars, dollars, dollars? No beauty, no—"

"Forgive me, Madge," he said gently. "I didn't mean to hurt you, or speak slightingly of your work. If you love it, then I shall love it, too, for your sake. Perhaps I don't understand, as you say. But that is because I've had no one to teach me. If you will undertake the task, I shall try to learn. I want to be what you want me to be."

The girl stood quite still, clasping and unclasping her hands. His voice, his eyes, his whole personality, pleaded his cause for him far more eloquently than his words.

"I'll try to like the people you like, too," he went on, pushing the slight advantage he had gained. "Some of 'em aren't so bad. Little Eversley, for in-

stance. But when it comes to Harvey, of course we're agreed."

"In what way?" she asked.

"Well, of course, you know, he's a little beast, and—"

"Stop! He is not! He is a wonderful man! His painting of 'Sunrise' is great—great! And you dare to speak of him as a 'little beast'!"

Alton gave a little sigh of despair. It seemed impossible to express an opinion without colliding with one of Madge's many prejudices and making her angry. That she spoke disparagingly of his business, his friends, himself, without ruffling his temper, did not occur to him.

"You see," she said, "we can't talk two minutes without quarreling. What would happen if we married? We should both be miserable. If I loved you, perhaps—just perhaps—we might get along. But I don't really love you. I like you, I'm fond of you as a friend, as a comrade. And that's all.

"That might be enough if we were congenial, if our tastes were similar. But as things are, it isn't enough. I love my work—I live for it. You care nothing about it. Jack, it's useless. I have made up my mind. I don't want to hurt you, but—but I can't give you any other answer. Won't you forget to-day, and just go on being the same as we were before?"

Alton shook his head gravely.

"I've got to the point where it has to be all or nothing, Madge," he replied. "I can't go on being friends, seeing you as I have, going about with you, knowing all the time that I love you, fighting against the desire to take you in my arms.

"You don't know what love means. There's no middle course about it. Either I've got to have you for my own—or I've got to go away where I won't see you."

The girl's eyes filled with tears; but she did not speak.

"Then it *is* good-by?"

She bowed her head; his lips just brushed her hand.

An instant later the door closed; she was alone.

It was unfortunate for both Jack Alton and Madge Blair that the latter had grown up to regard fame, of one sort or another, as the sole aim of life. The daughter of a brilliant and successful author, who had made a great name for himself, she had, from her earliest childhood, been thrown with men and women who had attained distinction and prominence in the world of art, letters, and music.

"Mere money getting," as Madge had put it, was to them beneath notice. If wealth resulted from their efforts, it was accepted, of course, and was not displeasing. But if money were lacking, they cheerfully lived in a garret, ill-fed and poorly clothed, "for art's sake."

Of course, Madge had always been well provided for. Her father's books had brought him a splendid income, and she had never known a reasonable wish ungratified. She had never known the pinch of poverty, had never been obliged to support herself, or, indeed, do any work, save that which her fancy dictated.

Perhaps, therefore, it was not altogether surprising that, living in such an environment, she should have imbibed somewhat fantastic ideas. She was not the first young woman, by any means, who, carried away by the delusion that she was endowed with unusual ability, had deliberately passed by the substance to seek the shadow.

Madge Blair's vocation, as she believed, lay in the direction of sculpture. Her work was indifferently good, but of this she was entirely unconscious, and her father's boasted frankness and freedom of speech stopped short of telling her that little talent and no trace of genius stamped her productions.

Her friends, too, praised her statues to an injudicious extent, until, firm in the conviction that she was on the road to fame, and that art was the only thing worth striving for, she belittled the work that Jack Alton was doing, simply because it was not creative. It had to do with the "baser things of life," was "sordid" and "mercenary," she told herself.

As she sat before the fire that afternoon, after Alton had taken his departure, she assured herself over and over again that she had acted for the best in sending the young man away from her.

They could never have been happy together, she argued; they lived in different spheres, looked at life from different points of view, had little or nothing in common.

Of Alton's good qualities, of his upright, honest dealings with all men, his thoughtful, generous nature, his clean, keen mind, his fine sense of honor, his sterling integrity, she took no account. He was just a business man to her, hard-headed, firm, far-seeing, just; but something was lack-

ing; something for which she had sought in vain.

With a sigh, Madge arose and went to her room to dress for dinner, resolutely putting aside all thoughts of Jack Alton. She knew she had pained him, as much by the reason for her refusal as by the refusal itself; but she felt that she had acted rightly in putting the case before him so that he would understand that there was no hope for his suit.

Her father kept her waiting in the dining-room for quite a few minutes after the bell had rung for the evening meal.

"Sorry to be late, dear," he said, as he took his place at the table, "but I went out for a walk this afternoon. I was a little tired after I finished the eighth chapter, and thought the air would do me good. It was so fine outdoors that I stayed longer than I expected. Were you out?"

"Jack was here," she replied, "and after he went I got thinking, and before I realized it, it was time to dress."

Arthur Blair's face lighted up at the mention of Alton's name.

"Ah!" he said. "I'll warrant you had something to think over! What are you going to do without him, eh?"

Madge frowned. Was it possible that Jack had had the bad taste to tell her father?

"He spoke as though this European trip were a sudden move on his part," continued Blair, without waiting for a reply. "I told him we should miss him a great deal; but of course, crossing the big pond in these days is mere child's play compared to what it used to be.

"When I was a lad, a trip abroad was the event of a lifetime; now people go and come almost between meals. Jack sails at noon to-morrow, I believe. You're going to see him off?"

"He—he didn't ask me," stammered Madge. Not for worlds would she have her father know that Jack Alton had said nothing to her of his intention to go abroad. She was hurt at his obvious neglect; but for the moment the sudden knowledge that he was indeed going "away where he would not see her," banished all other considerations.

She sat silently turning the matter over in her mind, wondering if her refusal of him had influenced his sudden decision. Surely if he had known of it in the afternoon he would have mentioned it.

"I sha'n't be able to get down to the dock to-morrow," observed Blair, as he rose from the table. "The story is going so well now that I dare not take the time. You'll excuse me this evening, won't you Madge? It is very absorbing."

A few minutes after her father had left her to return to his study, a note was brought to Madge, as she sat again before the open fire in the library, trying to concentrate her attention on a book.

It was from Alton, she saw at once, and tearing it hastily open, she read:

MY DEAR MADGE:

I am sailing for Europe to-morrow, on the Blue Star Line, and I cannot say when I shall return. I may not come back at all. There is nothing to keep me in America, now that Homer is capable of taking my place. I'm not needed at the office.

Had you cared for me, things might have been different. You won't think I'm a quitter, will you? I can't tell you just how it is—you wouldn't understand, anyway; but somehow, things don't seem the same; the game doesn't seem worth the candle. There's only one way out of it for me, and I'm going to take that way.

Good-by, little girl. I think it will be easier for us both if I do not see you again. I wish that it had been given to me to take care of you, to make you happy. But since it had not, all I can do is to wish for you the best there is in life.

When I saw you to-day, I had not yet decided to take this step; it occurred to me only after I got back to the office that it was the best thing to do.

Think of me sometimes, dear; and remember always that I love you. JACK.

Twice she read the letter, then folded it up and slipped it in the bosom of her gown. Jack was really going away, then; and he had said that he might never come back. Somehow she felt very much alone.

Did his presence, his companionship, mean so much to her? Was it possible that she had been mistaken, that she cared for him, after all? No; the idea was absurd. She liked him as a friend, as she had told him; that was all. She had grown fond of him, used to having him with her.

This must be the reason that the knowledge that for a long time she would not see him again gave her such a queer, empty feeling in her heart. It was not nice of Jack to make her feel badly, she told herself. He was probably angry at her, and had taken this way of showing it.

And yet—if she had missed him so in just one evening, what should she do in all

the long evenings to come, when he should be thousands of miles away?

Impatient at herself she rose and went up to her studio, snapping on the electric light and almost immediately snapping it off again. Somehow, her work did not appeal to her to-night, but then, she was not in the mood to do anything. She was restless.

She looked in at her father, but he was deep in his writing, and she did not like to disturb him. Ten o'clock seemed a very long time in coming; but when it did, assured that no one would call, she went to her room and to bed, determined to go at once to sleep and so shake off the uncomfortable feeling that had suddenly come over her. After tossing uneasily for some time, she finally fell into a troubled slumber.

II.

SHE breakfasted alone the next morning, her father having ordered some coffee and rolls sent to his desk; but she was quite used to taking her meals by herself.

Since his wife's death, which had occurred when Madge was about ten years of age, Arthur Blair had fallen into the habit of going directly from his dressing-room to his study. He said that his ideas flowed freer in the early morning, and Madge never dreamed of interrupting him.

Almost her first waking thought had been that to-day Jack was going away, but she refused to permit her mind to dwell on it, telling herself sharply that she was silly to allow it to disturb the well-ordered routine of her day. He would come back some time, and perhaps his sojourn abroad would broaden his mind, awaken his ambition, and give him appreciation and understanding.

All the morning Madge worked at her modeling. She was copying a head which she had completed some time before, and which had become broken by a fall from its pedestal; and the work required all her skill and attention.

After a hasty luncheon, which she ate by herself, for her father was still shut up in his study, she again repaired to the studio and resumed her work.

For some reason or other, it failed to satisfy her. This or that was wrong; the nose was badly modeled, the curve of the chin lacked symmetry. She had seemingly developed a critical sense which before she had not possessed, and it made her uneasy. Yesterday these faults had not been apparent to her, yet they had undoubtedly been there.

About the middle of the afternoon there was a knock on the studio door.

"Come in," she said, and with slow steps her father entered. His face was pale and drawn, and he looked deeply agitated.

"What is it, father?" asked the girl anxiously, dropping her tools and going quickly to him. "What has happened? You look so strange."

"A terrible thing, Madge! A terrible thing! Are you brave enough to bear bad news—horrible news?"

A strange fear tugged at her heart—a strange, unnamable fear that quickened her breath and set her trembling.

"What is it? Tell me quickly."

"Jack—he—he has—" Blair paused, as if uncertain how to continue.

"Jack! Has anything happened to Jack? Oh, tell me, quickly! Can't you see—the suspense—tell me!"

"Jack is dead—by his own hand! He committed suicide in his cabin on the liner just before she sailed."

"No! No! I will not believe it! I will not!" The girl's voice rang out in an anguished cry, as if she had received a mortal wound. "Tell me it isn't true, father! Tell me it isn't true!"

"My poor little girl!" There was exquisite sympathy in Blair's low tones. "I can't tell you it isn't true—for it is. It is all in the papers, and I telephoned down to the office of the steamship company and had it confirmed."

"Jack! Dead!" For a moment she stood, staring stupidly before her. Then she turned and groped her way blindly to a chair.

"Did it mean so much to you, dear?" asked her father gently.

She raised her eyes to his, and he shuddered at the expression of anguish and despair that he saw there.

"I loved him," she said.

Blair gently stroked her hair, longing to say something to comfort her, but knowing intuitively that silence was best. She sat perfectly still, her hands clasped in her lap, staring at the floor. Her eyes were dry; there are some griefs that are too great for tears. And one of these had come to Madge Blair.

Jack Alton was dead. He had killed himself, and it was her fault. She had let him be with her, had shown pleasure in his companionship, and then, when he had grown to care for her, she had sent him away.

And now he was dead, and she had loved him. Now that it was too late, now that she would never see him again, she realized it. She had not liked him, she had not been fond of him; she had loved him. Had loved him? She loved him now! But she had told him she did not care for him; and he had gone away—to his death.

Death by his own hand! The horror, the awful horror of it! She closed her eyes, striving to shut out the hideous visions the thought conjured up. How had he died? By what means?

"Father," she said, "how did Jack—how did he do it?" Her voice was quite calm and even.

"He shot himself — through the heart. It was just as the ship was about to sail. They sent the—the body and his baggage ashore. It is in all the papers. I will—"

The girl shrank back, holding up her hands, as if to ward off a blow.

"No—no; not that! I don't want to see it." She was silent for a moment, her forefinger tracing the pattern on the chints that covered the arm of the chair. Then she looked up.

"Father," she said clearly, "it was my fault. I drove him to it!"

"What?"

She nodded.

"Yes. Yesterday when he was here he asked me to marry him, and I told him I would not. I said he had never done anything worth while. I called him a dabbler. And when he went away he said it was all or nothing—that he couldn't go on seeing me if I didn't love him."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Blair sharply. "There's some mistake, Madge. He meant that he wouldn't come here any more. Jack Alton was too fine a chap to do such a thing as this on your account—on account of any woman. He might be badly cut up about it, but he wouldn't allow it to wreck his life.

"No; you can depend upon it, there is some reason of which we know nothing. It will probably come out later."

"There isn't anything else. He loved me, and I was cruel, wicked. I told him he had never done anything worth while," she repeated.

"Nonsense!" Blair said again. "Suppose you did tell him that? He knew better, and it wouldn't affect him. Everyone knows what Jack has done."

"What has he done?"

"You mean to say you don't know?"

"No."

"You never heard that old John Alton died in debt? That his business affairs were in a terrible tangle, and that Jack straightened things out and put the business on a paying basis? That he discharged the last cent of his father's obligations and cleared the old man's name? You didn't know that, Madge?"

"No, I didn't know that."

"And, of course, he wouldn't tell you. He'd be the last man to speak of it. He loved his father, and he never mentions or allows any one else to mention the old man's difficulties in his presence. But it's no secret that he carried a big burden, and made a brave fight against enormous odds.

"Why, he was the best silk salesman in the States, I believe. Could put goods in anywhere almost. A regular wonder. And now, he—oh, Madge, I don't understand it. It was a coward's act, and Jack Alton was no coward."

"Father, I taunted him. I told him I couldn't respect him; that he had never done anything on his own initiative, but had traded on his father's reputation. I hurt him—I must have hurt him, but how much I did not know then.

"He never told me what he had done. I believed what I said; how was I to know what he had been doing to save his father's name? Oh, it is all my fault—my fault!"

All that Arthur Blair could say or do would not move her. In vain he argued and reasoned. She was firm in her belief that she, and she alone, had been responsible for Alton's mad act. And at last, at her own request, Blair left her alone in the studio.

Sitting on a low chair, opposite the unfinished statue, she looked long and silently at her work.

"I sent him away from me—for that," she whispered dully. "Because he said I might 'potter in clay,' if I liked. Who am I—*what* am I, that I should have *dared* to say such things to him? I, who played at life, who set myself above him."

For her father had told her fully of how

Jack had worked early and late, never sparing himself, never resting until his father's creditors were paid in full, that John Alton's name might bear no stigma.

"I was blind! Blind!" she said bitterly. "I thought myself above him, looked down on him, because he did not wear long hair and queer clothes, and pretend to be other than he was. I thought that I had talent, genius; that sculpture was 'my life-work.' No wonder he laughed.

"I built myself a god of clay, and saw nothing beyond it. I shut my eyes; and when love came to me, the love of the best, the bravest man I have ever met, I did not recognize it. I passed it by and clung to my senseless, lifeless clay. I drove the love of that big, noble heart away from me. I have been a fool, a blind, selfish, conceited woman; but I can see now. I shall never be blind again."

A hammer lay on the bench before her. She seized it—lifted it above her head. A moment later, the statue lay in fragments at her feet. She looked down at it, a strange little smile on her lips.

"The god of clay," she said. And then, with slow steps and drooping head, she went to her own room.

III.

THE days and nights that followed were black with horror, haunted by visions of Jack Alton. She would wake shrieking from sleep, bathed in cold perspiration, terrified almost out of her senses at the hideous dreams that came to her.

And then, in the daylight hours, she saw him as he had been that summer when they were together, grave or gay, laughing or serious, but always thoughtful of her comfort; always with the tender light in his eyes, eloquent of his love for her.

In her eyes, he was a martyr to her capricious fancy. If he had been a coward, seeking to end his trouble with the bullet from a revolver, she felt that it was her fault. She had driven him to it. Ceaselessly she reproached herself. Her morbid imagination ran riot. She felt herself a murderess, as much as if hers had been the hand that sped the fatal bullet.

She had, in her ignorance and crass conceit, made light of what he was doing, of all that he had done, never dreaming that his achievement dwarfed into insignificance the things she had always regarded as "worth while."

A hundred times she read the letter he had sent her the night before his death. Had he meant to end his life when he wrote it? Could she have prevented his act if she had understood the meaning of those phrases aright?

"You won't think I'm a quitter, will you?" he had said. "When I saw you to-day, I had not decided to take this step." What step did he mean? Going abroad, or going on that journey from which there is no return? "Things don't seem the same; the game doesn't seem worth the candle. There's only one way out of it for me, and I'm going to take that way."

And the way had been long and dark, but he had not faltered. Life without her had meant nothing to him. And her life? Without Jack Alton, was it worth the living? With her own hand she had drawn a dark, impenetrable curtain forever between herself and happiness.

Of the details of his death, she knew nothing. She could not bring herself to read the terrible story in the papers; and her father, again absorbed in his book, almost oblivious to what was going on about him, had seen none of the accounts. He kept himself, for the most part, in his study, working almost incessantly at his writing; and Madge shut herself up in her studio, and brooded ceaselessly over the ruins of the statue and of two lives.

Arthur Blair never for a moment realized the unnatural state of mind into which his daughter had drifted. He knew nothing of the destruction of the statue, supposing that Madge was still hard at work upon it; and he was too absorbed in manufacturing tragedies on paper to understand that a real one was being enacted under his own roof.

She was not of a particularly nervous temperament, but the sudden realization that she had loved Jack Alton, the knowledge that he was dead, and her belief that she was the one upon whom the responsibility for the tragedy rested, had been almost too much for her to bear.

Every day, every hour, she missed Alton more. There was no one to whom she could talk of her trouble, no one to whom she could unburden her mind of the load of anguish and remorse that weighed so heavily upon her, driving the color from her cheeks and the light from her eyes.

She could expect no one to understand her feelings. Her father's, her own friends,

would declare that she had been mistaken, that Jack Alton had taken his life through no fault of hers; and then they would tell her to seek solace in her art. Her art!

She had no art. It had been merely a delusion, her belief that she could create beautiful things from clay. The only beautiful thing she had ever created, she had destroyed by a few careless, heartless words.

She had accused Alton of lacking appreciation for the "finer things of life, the beautiful, the rare." He? No! He had been possessed of the finest, the most beautiful, the rarest thing in all the world, a great, true strong love for a human being.

She, and she alone, had been the one who had failed of appreciation. She had been working for her own selfish pleasure, for fame, for the applause of the public; while he had had no thought for himself, striving only to remove the reproach that attached to his father's name, to clear away the load of debt that had been his only heritage from the old manufacturer.

And so the days lengthened into weeks; but the girl took no account of time, her mind revolving always in the same weary, hopeless circle—that Jack Alton was dead, and that she had killed him, not he himself.

A month from the day she had refused Alton, Madge Blair's oldest friend would scarcely have known her. She was thin almost to emaciation; her slender figure had lost its supple curves, her step its lightness.

Her cheeks were hollow; her eyes, dull and lusterless, were sunken far into her head. She looked like an old and broken woman.

In her studio, the shattered statue still lay upon the floor. Upon it, upon the hardened clay, the casts, the tools, the furniture, lay a thick coating of dust. She seldom entered the room now, but sat before the grate in the library, her hands clasped in her lap, gazing with listless, unseeing eyes into the fire.

Her voice, when she spoke at all, was pitched in a musicless monotone, as different from its old sweetness as she was different from the joyous, happy girl of a short month ago. A month? To her, the time that had passed since Jack Alton had died seemed endless.

One evening she sat there, soon after she had finished the pretense at eating what she called dinner. The house was very still. Her father had not joined her at the meal. He had just reached the climax of his novel and was blind and deaf to all else.

The door-bell rang; but the girl did not move. The maid had orders to deny her to all callers, and she knew she would be undisturbed.

She heard footsteps in the hall, a low, indistinct murmur of conversation, and then the closing of the front door.

"Madge!" said some one behind her.

"Yes," she said; "yes, Jack."

She did not turn her head, although she recognized Alton's voice. All day long it was in her ears, sometimes pleading, sometimes reproachful, sometimes masterful; but always tender, always thrilling with his love for her.

"Madge, aren't you going to say you're glad to see me?"

The voice was closer now—behind her chair. Some one was standing beside her. She looked up.

Was this another fantom come to torture her? Was this another vision of her overwrought, tortured mind?

"Jack!" she whispered. "Jack!"

"Madge!" It was a cry of surprise, almost of horror. The figure was bending over her now, one hand under her chin, lifting her pale, wan face so that the firelight fell full upon it.

"What *have* you been doing to yourself? Have you been ill?"

"Jack! Is it really you?"

"Really and truly! Whom did you think it was? I just got in this afternoon and ran over to talk to you for a moment. Jane said you were not receiving, but that she thought you would see me.

"Why, girlie, what's the matter?" He bent over her, almost in consternation.

For she had sunk back in her chair, covering her face with her hands, while tears streamed from her eyes and her breast heaved with great, choking sobs.

"Jack!" she murmured, as if incredulous of the evidence of her senses.

"Tell me what is troubling you, dear," he said gently. "Can't I help you? Tell me, Madge!"

"I—we thought you were dead," she faltered. "It—father saw it in the paper, and they told him at the steamship office that it was true. I can hardly believe that you are alive and here."

"You mean to say it was reported in the *papers* that *I* was dead?" cried Alton, in

amazement. "Why — and you've believed it all this time?"

She nodded.

"And it wasn't so?" she said.

Alton laughed—his old, pleasant laugh, that sent a thrill through the girl beside him.

"Hardly, since I'm here," he said. "It was all a stupid mistake. A man shot himself in my cabin, and they supposed at first that it was I. I was late in going aboard; and in the meantime, all my things had been sent ashore, except a suit-case that I fortunately carried with me.

"We had been under way for a couple of hours before I discovered what had been done, and then it was too late to remedy matters. The ship wasn't equipped with wireless, so I couldn't communicate with any one ashore; and anyway, when I reached the other side, I found a letter from Homer, in which he said that the man had been identified, and that he himself had claimed and taken care of my baggage.

"I don't understand how it came about that the affair was reported that way in the papers, but it must have been corrected afterward. It is strange that you did not learn that a mistake had been made."

"I have seen no one, talked to no one," explained Madge in a stifled voice. "And I couldn't bear to read the papers, so I knew nothing about the correction.

"Father has been very busy; and he hasn't seen a newspaper in weeks. He never reads when he is at work."

Alton's eyes flashed. It seemed to him that the artistic temperament of Arthur Blair was more a curse than a blessing, if it could blind him to his daughter's suffering and obvious ill-health.

"I—I thought that you had—had done it on account of what I said," Madge went on unsteadily, "and I was so sorry—so terribly sorry. I didn't understand, and I was hateful, cruel to you. I would have given anything to be able to unsay the things that I said to you that day."

Instinctively, Alton drew back, and his face paled slightly. It had not been because she had loved him, then, that she had grieved so, but because she had been torturing herself with fantastic notions that she had been responsible for his supposed death.

He took a firm grip on himself; at any rate, he would say nothing to cause her any more sorrow.

"I found when I got to London that I would have to settle some things over here, if I intended to stay there permanently," he told her, "and anyway, a number of important documents were in the baggage that had been sent ashore.

"So I came back as soon as I could. And I wanted to tell you at once that I regretted what I had said to you and what I had written. If I cannot have your love, Madge, I must be content with your friendship.

"If you will grant me that, if you will let me go on seeing you sometimes, before I go away for good, I shall hold the privilege dearer than anything else in the world."

Madge looked shyly up at him. Still he did not understand; but his misunderstanding was different now.

"You have your art," he went on, "and that fills your life. But if you can find a little place for me, I shall be grateful."

Madge rose, a little unsteadily, for the miracle that had given him back to her after she had believed him dead had completely unnerved her, and she was already weak and frail.

"Come!" she said, holding out her hand.

Alton took it; and she led him up the stairs and into the little studio, steadying herself by the back of a chair, while she turned on the electric light.

"Look!" she said, as she pointed to the fragments of the broken statue.

Alton looked, his eyes taking in all the details; the deserted, unused look of the room, the scattered tools, the clay-stained apron on the floor, the dust that lay thick over all.

He moved a step nearer to her.

"There is my art," she said, very softly. "I have no art now; I never had, although I did not know it. I have learned the difference between the illusion and the real in these terrible weeks. I think I know what my 'life-work' is now."

"And what is it, Madge?" he asked, a wonderful hope springing up in his heart.

"To make you happy," she said; and her smile was the old, sweet smile that he had known and loved.

"And I," he said, a little later, when they had gone back to the big chair before the library fire, and were watching the leaping flames as they curled over the logs, "I have loved you. That's something 'worth while' I have done, after all, dear."

The Ribbon of Fate

By George Allan England

A COMPLETE NOVEL.

CHAPTER I.

ORDERS.

"WHAT?" gasped the assistant secretary of the navy.

Had one of the prospective enemy's maximite bombs let go under his swivel-chair the shock could have been no greater.

"*What?* What's that you say?" he blurted, starting up. He leaned across the broad mahogany desk, staring. One of his great hands, fingers wide-spread, plowed through the sheaves of paper there. His black eyes widened with horror. Reddening dully, then all at once going a trifle gray about the chin, he stood there staring at young Darrow, who quietly returned the gaze.

"You—you mean to tell me this?" exclaimed the secretary. "You, a mere oil-checker in the lighthouse establishment? You dare—dare hint this to me? To *me?* About a—a—"

He suddenly stammered and became quite inarticulate. Darrow marveled at the stupendous effect his few simple words had produced. Yet, after all, why should they have not? On the eve of war the mere mention of such a contingency was enough to have convulsed the nation.

The secretary turned, walked over to the window, and for a moment stood there, looking out over the budding greenery of Lafayette Square. His tall, square-shouldered figure seemed to fill the space. Darrow peered at him with eyes which burned eagerly in his thin, flushed face. Astride the clerk's hawk-nose, a pair of round, black-rimmed glasses gave him an owlish look.

The secretary wheeled about. Calmer he seemed now—much calmer. His evidently was a nerve of steel.

"What proofs have you got?" snapped he. "Whom do you suspect, if anybody?"

"Proofs?" repeated Darrow, his lips trembling a little as he tried to moisten them with a dry tongue. "Proofs? Well, sir, to be frank, I haven't got much yet. Just a scrap or two of torn paper, and one or two actions I've noticed the past few days. But—"

"Paper? Where is it? Got it? If so, give it to me at once."

"Can't, sir," the clerk replied, shaking

his head. "Sorry, but it's not here. It's in my desk, down in the lighthouse office."

"I must have it. Where did you find it?"

"Well, sir—that's telling."

The secretary squinted at him a second. Then he stepped to the door that led into the outer office and quietly opened it. He peered through. Nobody there. The desks, chairs, and typewriters all stood deserted, for the hour was four-thirty.

Back came the secretary, having closed the door, a strange, inscrutable expression on his rather heavy features.

"You mean to say you won't tell?" snapped he, still unnaturally pale.

"Why, sir, it's this way. If I tell you where I found this paper, and show it to you, and let you have it, I might be doing the ad—that is, I might be working an injustice on a high official, such as could never be undone. I'd be letting this thing get out of my hands even before I was sure of it myself. Pardon me for saying it, sir, but it will be impossible for anybody to extort either the information or the data from me until I know a little more."

The secretary frowned blackly.

"Do you know what you're saying?" exclaimed he. "This is a matter for the secret service, not for underclerks or civilians. Do you realize anything of the risk you're running in thus assuming a rôle outside your own activities?"

"Yes, sir, I do. But I've got to do it, just the same. Any true American would. I wouldn't be risking my position, my whole future in the department to have—well, butted in here and told you what I have, sir, if I hadn't felt there was something serious in it. I'm not courting martyrdom. But at a time like this—you understand."

"Of course — of course," the secretary hastened to reply. He jerked out his handkerchief; and now, a little recovered from his first emotion, wiped his bald brow. "But do you, can you realize the danger of all this to you? Even to have your name breathed in connection with an affair like this, now—an affair such as you claim to have grounds for suspecting is shaping up in your department—"

"Pardon me, sir, I never said it was in my department. I named no one."

"No, but I can read you better than you know. In your department, I repeat. Even to be an innocent participant in such an affair may be fatal. High treason with a war impending is no joke. It's—it's death."

His voice sank almost to a whisper. Straight in Darrow's blinking eyes he peered. The young clerk felt a deadly, sinking sensation. In a flash he realized what manner of thing he had done even to breathe his suspicions to this man high in authority.

For a moment he seemed to behold Captain Dreyfus, the perjured witnesses, Devil's Island; to realize how unspeakably perilous it was even to become entangled in the remotest outer tentacles of such a case. But now retreat was too late. He had spoken; he must go on. Nor could he let those precious scraps of paper, idly picked up in the corridor outside Admiral Burke's door—just little charred bits, hidden in a dark corner, as though they had been blown there by the spring wind—nor could he let these now pass from his hands.

His only safety now lay in retaining them, in learning more, in clinching the case. Retreat meant ruin. He must go ahead.

"Do you realize what you're doing?" asked the secretary again, his voice incisive as a blade.

"Yes, sir. But—well, I can't help it."

"You speak of papers? Where do you think they came from?"

"I don't know. If somebody had torn up something of that sort and thrown it into an open fire, fragments might possibly have gone up the chimney and been blown about."

"Are there open fireplaces in your department offices?"

"Of course, sir."

"In the chief's office?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you wish to state now that in your opinion—"

"Excuse me, sir, but I state nothing."

The secretary's black eyes shot sudden rage. Here evidently was a hard nut in the person of this young and obstinate oil-checker. True, the clerk could be annihilated by virtue of the secretary's superior power, but what would that profit? Clearly the secretary understood that to force the issue now would involve publicity and unforeseen complications. So, with a grumble of anger, a vow of vengeance, he exclaimed:

"Listen, now!"

"Yes, sir."

"If you are determined not to put this into my hands, or—that is, not to make any accusations I can work on till you have some further facts—why have you come to me with it at all?"

"I wanted to put you, too, on the lookout, sir, so that from your office here another line of investigation could be going on. Then, when I—"

"Oh, very well. You mean to dictate to me, what?" And the secretary's face grew hard as adamant. "Now, then, here are my terms. You've got to prove this."

"Prove—*prove* it?"

"Yes, and quickly, too."

"But—"

"No *if, and,* or *but* about it. You've begun; you've got to finish. With a suspicion like this horrible one corroding your mind, sooner or later, voluntarily or not, you're bound to let it slip. No, no; there's no such thing as burying a secret like *that* in your own heart. This thing, if true, means that on the very eve of war some high official is planning to deliver Pearl Harbor, and with it Hawaii, to the enemy for a staggering price. It means national catastrophe. What? And you, once engaged in this suspicion, now want to withdraw from the search? Impossible."

"But, sir," stammered Darrow, "my idea is merely to work this thing out a little more, and then submit it to you to be handled by the secret service. I—*I'm* no detective. How can *I* prove anything like this?"

"No, no, you can't evade the issue that way," the secretary headed him off. "*This* is no matter to be let out into other channels where perhaps we cannot circumscribe it. Here you come to me, you, an unknown clerk, with a wild-goose tale such as on the face of it is perfectly preposterous.

"All based on what? A few scraps of paper, a few trifling indications such as might mean a thousand other things than this. Heaven alone knows how much damage your suspicions may not have done already. If, as is quite possible," and the secretary fixed keen, unfriendly eyes upon him, "if you have mentioned this to anybody else than me—"

"Not a word, sir. Not a word. And I swear it."

"Very well, that remains to be seen. You'd better not, that's all I say to you. Remember! Even so, if this proves false, this suspicion of yours; if you have chosen in mere idle curiosity to spy and peek and magnify these trifles; if you have vainly sought to question the integrity of some superior as yet unidentified—then, sir, you will regret it. Mark my words. You will regret it, if you can't prove it."

At Darrow he shook a menacing finger as he sat down ponderously at the great desk. The clerk paled still more.

"You—you mean, sir," he began, "that I've got to—to furnish absolute proof? To identify the suspect?"

"Just that. And soon! Hark, now! This is no matter susceptible of delays. Inside of twenty-four hours you bring me proof, *proof,* do you understand? Or by the eternal you'll discover what it means to impugn the honor and the integrity of the service."

"But— Listen, sir—"

"Not another word." Again the secretary smote his desk. A mere civilian underling. Darrow knew only too well the futility of argument.

"*Go!*" cried the secretary. "And remember I give you twenty-four hours, not one minute longer. If by then you can't substantiate these accusations—well, Heaven help you, that's all! Now, *go!*"

CHAPTER II.

A VAIN SEARCH.

SICK terror numbing his very soul, his mind a daze, the lighthouse board clerk heard the door of the naval secretary's office boom shut behind him like the crack of doom.

Too stunned even to realize the unexpected turn of events, the crushing menace that now overhung him, too beaten down for a thorough understanding of just what he must do to save himself, he stumbled down the hallway, hat in hand.

Subconsciously he felt a tiny spark of gratitude for the lateness of the hour, which spared him the probability of meeting anybody in the corridors. Yet how infinitesimal a comfort this compared with the catastrophe that had smitten him. For a moment he paused at one of the half-open windows to catch his breath, a little to compose himself, before returning to his office.

A glint of gray-green from the Potomac, shimmering under the late afternoon sun, caught his eye. The tall, accusing finger of the monument set him shuddering.

"Can't I get away from it anywhere?" he rebelled. "Must *everything* remind me of lighthouses, and—and *that?* Good Heavens, what a fool I've been! If I hadn't seen beyond my routine reports, checkings,

filings, and entries; if I hadn't thought of anything but so many cases of such-and-such test oil at so much per case, I wouldn't ha' got into *this*."

Then, shaking his head, weak with sickening apprehension, he started slowly toward the lighthouse offices once more.

As he went, he mentally reviewed the evidence.

"First," thought he, "those scraps of paper. After all, what do they prove? Mere jottings. Even the character or two on the back—do they constitute proof? And next, the fact that Burke has been at the office three evenings in the last ten days, is that anything? Mightn't a rear-admiral in charge of the Twelfth District, which contains Hawaii, have extra work on his hands without that necessarily being in any way connected with those scraps of typewriting? What real grounds have I for suspecting what I do?

"True enough, Burke's been hard hit the last year by that Carnegie Trust Company smash-up and by his son's losses. I suppose a father would do about anything to keep a young fellow like that from behind bars. But—wouldn't all this have made him extra careful? Inasmuch as everybody knows his salary's only about a tenth of what he needs, wouldn't that put him on his guard against even the suspicion of evil? The more so as he does have charge of the Pearl Harbor district? Hanged if *I* can see my way clear, one way or the other. Can't make head or tail out of it, worse luck. Fool that I was, not to have chucked the whole infernal business and forgotten it. Fool to have sprung it, half cocked, on the secretary, and now be forced to make good inside a single day, or — or — get ruined."

Thus moodily thinking, with keen anxiety preying on his distressed mind, he stood there pondering.

Ten minutes later he was at his desk again. Save for himself and old Danny Hayes, the negro sweeper, the long, many-windowed room was empty. Dan, busy with brush and sawdust and obnoxious clouds of official dust, paid no heed to the clerk, other than to glance at him with a kind of mild, bovine astonishment. Clerks who came back after hours were rare.

Darrow unlocked his desk-top and slid it up. Then suddenly he uttered a cry of sharp surprise.

The desk had been hastily searched. One glance showed him the disorder, the eager raffling-over of his papers, the displacement of all his things.

"What?" cried he. Then, quickly realizing the necessity for strategy, he grew outwardly calm again.

"Oh, Dan! I say, Dan, there!" he cried.

"Wha'? Wha' yo'-all want, Mist' Darrer?" answered the black, pausing in his task.

"What d'you mean by trying to straighten up my things this way? How many times d'you need to be told I don't want it and won't have it? Well?"

"Me, sah? *Ah* ain't tetch nothin'."

"Now, now! Don't tell me that, you!" the clerk retorted angrily. "How could anybody else but you do it? Who else would have a pass-key?"

Dan, the whites showing all the way around his eyes, flapped slowly down the room, dragging his brush behind him.

"'Deed I dunno, sah!" he protested. "'Tain't *me*, nohow!"

"You been here all the time since closing?"

"Yassah. Heah an' in de odder room. De a'miral, he had me sweep in dere, a few minutes. Say de dus' done make his asthma wuss."

"The admiral? Was he in here?"

"Why, yassah. Heah, an' in his office, sah."

"Is he there now?"

"Ah dunno, sah. Why?"

"How long were you in the other room?"

"Oh, mebbe five minutes, sah. Mebbe ten. Ah ain't know 'zackly. Whaffor you'-all wanter know?"

"Oh, nothing, Dan, but I'm kind of fussy. Thought somebody'd been borrowing my fountain-pen ink again, that's all. Well, go along now, get busy! I've got some work to finish. Don't stand there staring at me like a joss!"

"All—all right, sah! Ah shorely is sorry ef yo' ink am gone, but Ah ain't know one blessed t'ing about it, no sah, not one blessed t'ing!"

Darrow ignored him, and the aged negro, grumbling, took himself back to his sawdust-pile.

Picking up a Commerce and Labor report, the clerk walked down the room to the admiral's private office. He knocked.

No answer.

He tried the door. It was locked.

"Dan! Dan!"

"Yas, boss?"

"Just let me in here, a minute. I forgot to leave something for the chief. Something he may need, to-night, if he comes down."

"All right, sah!" And Dan, shaking his woolly old head with irritation, hobbled to do the young man's bidding.

Once in the inner office, Darrow laid the report in a disused corner of the book-shelf, where out-of-date matter was stored and where it would attract no attention. Then he came out, and Dan once more locked the door behind him. But in that brief moment he had seen and smelled a good deal.

"Chief hasn't been gone more than five minutes, I reckon," thought Darrow. "And what's more, he went out through the hall door, not through the outer office."

Then, smiling a little to himself, he went back to his desk. "Whoever it was that searched my desk, I don't know," thought he, "but they got left a-plenty, anyhow!"

When Dan was out of sight again, Darrow opened his little pencil drawer. He removed it entirely. Then, reaching far into the little hiding-place, he extracted a yellow official envelope.

"Lucky I didn't leave *that* lying 'round loose!" said he to himself, as he ripped it open and peeked inside. "Yes, they're all safe and sound. Safe as can be!"

Out on the desk he shook them—three small, charred bits of a thin sleazy paper.

As he arranged them side by side, certain letters became visible. These letters, typewritten with blue ink and in a script font, seemed to spell nothing but the most baffling nonsense.

Several of the fragments of words were not even English in appearance. But Darrow seemed to guess a little of their significance. And quickly he placed them in what he judged to have been something like their original position, before the sheet on which they had been written had been torn to bits, and—so it seemed—flung into a fire of some sort.

"Lots of open fireplaces in all these buildings," mused Darrow, as he worked. "That proves nothing. But if I get these things into proper shape maybe I can figure 'em out, in time. Maybe? Got to!"

He took up one of the fragments.

"Now this," he commented, "evidently goes at the left hand side. The bit of margin, here, proves that all right enough."

Quickly he affixed the bits of this stupendously important puzzle to a sheet of fresh white paper. They read:

Part of the third fragment he left ungummed, so that it could be turned back like a flap.

"Got to be sure and have *this* free to show," he judged, as he made sure that on the back of the free portion the little pothooks of India ink were quite visible—the marks which had first excited his suspicions and which, in all probability, could have originated nowhere else than from an oriental writing-brush.

"Now," said he decisively, "to work!"

CHAPTER III.

HOT ON THE TRAIL.

A MOMENT he puzzled over the fragments, with knit brows. Then he nodded with satisfaction.

"Yes," thought he, "that 'Pea' means 'Pearl Harbor,' for sure! And 'Isla' 'Oa' means Island of Oahu!"

Quickly he reached for the 1911 annual report of the lighthouse board. In a moment he had found map 12.

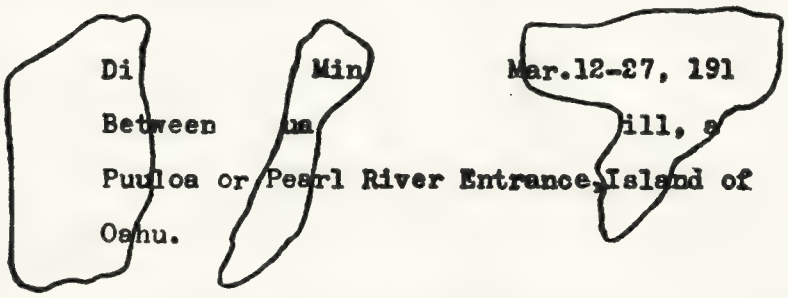
"Let's see!" he murmured, as with his pencil he began exploring the large scale-map of Honolulu and vicinity. "Here we are; Pearl Harbor, the strategic keystone of the whole group. 'Puu'? What's that?

Ah-ha! Puuloa! Puuloa or Pearl River entrance to the harbor! Sure as guns—that's it! 'Bet' means 'Between'! 'ar' must be 'March'!"

On another sheet of paper he quickly copied out the fragments, and began filling in the connecting words as fast as he could locate them. The inscription now read:

"Now," Darrow rejoiced, "all I've got to do is frame out that first line, and I've got it—got at least the clue to work from. After *that*—"

"Yo'-all a gwine home right soon, boss?" sounded Dan's deep voice from the other end of the long room. The clerk started guiltily. He had forgotten Dan, the office,



Eyes gleaming with excitement, lips compressed to a tight, thin line, two pink spots beginning to burn on his hollow cheeks, Darrow worked on and on.

"Come on, now! Come on!" he breathed eagerly to himself, as though he had been beside a race-track, encouraging his choice. And with intense eagerness he scrutinized the large scale-map of the harbor. His pencil traced lines here and there, paused, darted, and made black jabs.

"'Ua'?" he exclaimed. "That might mean anything! There's a little million of 'em, there! But—let's see, now—" And, laying one end of his pencil on the Puuloa entrance, he swung the other slowly round.

"Oh!" he ejaculated, as the answer fairly leaped up at him from the map. In a direct line, across the harbor to the southeast by east, with the city itself forming the third point of a flat triangle, he saw the words:

"Kapua entrance. Diamond Hill."

"That's it, sure!" he exulted; and now the puzzle said:

everything, even to the lateness of the hour, in that exciting search.

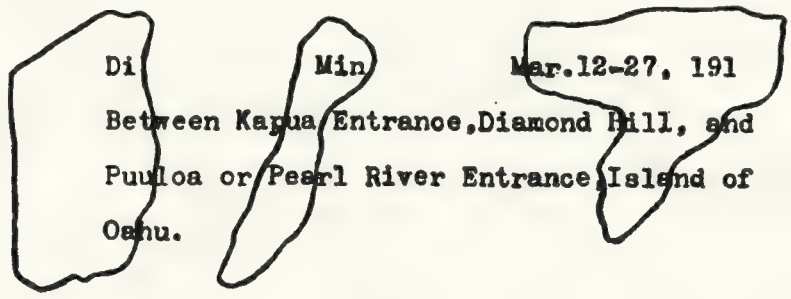
But now, as he looked up, as he peered with those owlish spectacles of his over the desk-top at the negro, he realized all at once that the western light was fading, that shadows were beginning to creep from the corners, that he could stay no longer. And with a grimace of displeasure, he made answer:

"All right, uncle, lock up. I'm off!"

For, much as he should have liked to remain, well he knew the danger of exciting Dan's suspicions. The old negro, garrulous like all his kind, might in a moment wreck all Darrow's plans. Much depended on a semblance of casuality.

So, gathering up some papers and slamming them into drawers, the clerk acted the part of finishing an unusually long day's work. The vital paper, however, the white sheet with the three fragments gummed to it, he did not leave.

Instead, he carefully placed it, with the partial solution, in his bill-fold, which he



buttoned up securely in his inside coat-pocket.

Then, locking his desk and giving Dan a hearty "Good night," he took his leave. His mind, as he left the building, swarmed with theories, perplexities, hopes, fears, and feverish desires.

Why had the secretary grown so angry at the news of this suspicious occurrence? Why had Admiral Burke been acting so suspiciously of late? Who had known that he, Darrow, had in his possession, in his desk, these fragments of paper? And who had seized the opportunity of his absence from that desk, of Dan's absence from the room, to make that hasty, futile search? These and a score of other vital questions whirled and seethed within his bewildered brain.

Like one tranced, he went down the broad steps and turned toward New York Avenue. Vaguely, like moving mists within a blurred crystal, he seemed to perceive vast, shifting forces whereof he could have no definite knowledge, no sure information. To him it seemed as though he were entangled, against his will, in some inexorable machinery of fate; as though a tide, a river of destiny were bearing him along, the sport and puppet of its vast, impersonal will.

"I *am* caught in—in something, Heaven knows what!" he realized, as he swung into the street and started toward the corner where he usually got his car for Brightwood. "Why should *I*, a mere nobody, just a cog in this enormous machinery, get mixed up in things this way? I'd give a year's salary to be out of it!"

But his mood could not endure. The early April warmth and perfume, the scent of new grass, the soft breeze from the river, soothed and comforted him. At first, seeming to feel that every passer-by, white or black, must fathom and divine his secret, he presently gained self-confidence once more. Even a pride, a sense of power now began to grow in him.

That he, just one of the army of underlings in a minor office, should by chance hold in his hands—skilled only to the typewriter and the reporter's pencil—secrets of state, perhaps, matters of life, death, national fate, the destiny of nations, thrilled him with a sudden flare of joy.

And, his head once more held high, fists hard-clenched, he strode along unmindful now of all the personal menace, peril, or prospects of tremendous evil.

"I *will* run this thing to earth, and do it quick!" he swore. "I may not be Sherlock Holmes. My name may be only James B. Darrow, oil-checker, Class 2B, age 21, but —well—wait! Wait, that's all!"

He hastened his pace now eager to get home, to reach his third-floor room in Mrs. Sagg's third-rate boarding-house on Myrtle Street. It seemed to him that if he could only sit there at the window, in the dusk, looking out over Rock Creek at the dim leaf-masses of the national park, the solution of that all-important first line would come to him. What might it not reveal? He felt a thrill of eagerness, of burning impatience to begin the vital problem.

Then all at once he stopped, struck by a sudden idea.

"Gee!" he ejaculated. "That never occurred to me! And it's maybe the most important thing of all!"

As a man will, when trying to readjust his mental processes, Darrow clasped his hands behind him, bent his head, and strolled along a little way, oblivious to all about him. Little he knew that, half a block behind, a husky individual in a gray suit and Panama, with bristly, close-cropped yellow mustache, had slacked his pace at the same moment, and now with sudden interest was studying the shop-window signs, as though looking for some very special place.

Unconscious of all this, Darrow suddenly raised his head again. Then, with a new set to his jaw, and new light in his eye, he turned and struck out rapidly for Twelfth Street.

The gray-suited man, imperturbable, presently ceased his inspection of the windows and seemed to come to the conclusion that he, too, had business in that section.

Darrow never stopped his rapid walk till he had reached the Universal Typewriter Exchange, at Twelfth and J. In he strode. The time was now 5.42.

"If I'm going to pull this off," thought he, "I've got to go some!"

Then, to a clerk who was just covering a machine with a rubber cloth: "Is Haskins here yet?"

"Hallo! That you, Jim?" sounded a voice from the repair-room, at the back. "Come on in!"

Darrow tramped into the back room. There sat Haskins in his shirt-sleeves at the bench. On his hands lay coats of grease, some of which had been transferred to his

nose. Never minding it, Darrow shook with him.

"Where you been, this month o' Sundays?" he exclaimed. "Haven't seen you since that I. W. W. ball. Dead? Married? What?"

"Oh, nothin'," replied the repair-man, reaching for his corn-cob. "Seems like *you* ain't been over-friendly."

"Busy as Hades, that's all," hedged Darrow. "How's your job panning out?"

"Fine, fine. Typewriters is where I live. That's me, every time. Anythin' you wanted in my line?"

"Well, I don't know. Maybe. I've been thinking for a day or two I might rent a machine to take home with me and work nights, a little. Fact is, Hasky, I've got the story-bug. Want to write a detective yarn for the—"

Haskins interrupted with a derisive snicker.

"You, kid?" he jibed.

"Yes, me! Why not?"

"Aw, ferget it!"

"I do, I tell you."

"Fine detective-story *you'd* write! Say, kid, you couldn't detect the Capitol on a clear day! Now—"

"Do you want to talk machines, or don't you?"

"Mean it? Mean biz?"

"That's what I said. Here, can you give me a machine with that kind of type? If you can, trot her out, p. d. q., and I'll take her for a month."

Speaking, he drew out his bill-book. From it he extracted the sheet of paper with the three fragments pasted thereon. This sheet he folded so as to show only the third bit of writing.

"There!" he exclaimed, exhibiting this specimen to Hasky, "there's the type that takes my bun! Come along now, give us that machine, and I'm on!"

"That?" sniffed the typewriter-man, lighting his pipe. He held the blazing match close to the paper—for already in the little back shop the light was failing fast—and earnestly inspected the writing for a minute. Then he shook his head.

"Naw!" exclaimed he, scornfully, "you don't want *that*. Why, that's a Redmond! One o' them sewin'-machine things, with spools an' bobbins, an' God knows what, in 'em. They're tied to the post, kid, believe *me*. What you want is—"

And like a rapid-fire gun he clacked off the names and virtues, selling-points and excellences of a dozen machines; all the kinds, in fact, carried by the Universal Exchange.

"So you don't think this is a good machine for me?" queried Darrow, as though half-convinced. "Strikes me, as a change from the regulation cut-and-dried thing, it's rather neat. You know I use the Jones Special, at the office. I want something different; want to try a new one. How about it?"

"Well," declared Hasky, blowing fumes, "that may all be, but you don't want *this*. Why, only ministers and spring poets use it. If you want to bury your work and double-cross it from the go-off, get one. Otherwise, nix! If there was any demand for it, don't you s'pose we'd list it? 'Stead o' that, nobody in town will even handle the darn thing. Come off! Get wise, kid; get wise!"

"Nobody in town handles 'em?" queried Darrow, as he once more pocketed his sample. A sudden sinking oppressed his heart. He felt as though the staging of all his plans had instantly been kicked away, leaving them to crumble into ruin. Had not the shop been so dark, Haskins must have noticed his expression; but as it was, the dim light shielded him from observation.

"Nobody has 'em you say?" repeated he.

"Why, nobody *I* know of, unless that little jerk Eye-talian place over on K Street. That 'fence,' I call it."

"What name?"

Hasky eyed his friend suspiciously a moment, then replied:

"Oh, pshaw! How do *I* know? Macaroni di Spagett, I guess. Bughouse, you? If you want an A1 machine, now, up to the minute, and a lallapalooza every way, I'm your huckleberry. But for the love o' Lou, cut out the coke-talk, the punk brands, and all such—"

"Good-by; see you later!" interrupted Darrow, glancing ostentatiously at his watch. "Got just five minutes to get my car, or have to wait half an hour. We'll have it out to-morrow. Ta-ta!"

And, leaving Haskins big-eyed with wonder, he vanished from the shop.

Sure nutty!" muttered the repair-man, picking up his screwdriver again. "With a big, big N! Story-writin'! On a Redmond! Now, *what* d'ye think o' that?"

Darrow, meanwhile, was making rapid tracks toward K street. The gray-suited man, a considerable distance in the rear, also decided that K Street was really the object of his rather dilatory search.

CHAPTER IV.

BROWBEATING BUCCAMANO.

AS Darrow hurried on the trail of the unknown, his plans as yet merely vague, he felt a subtle fire of excitement beginning to consume his patience.

Now that he had definitely entered this race with fate, which in a way had been forced upon him, he swore with firm-set jaw that he would see it through, would win at any cost, however high the stake, or go down in disgrace, defeat, and infamy. Less than twenty-four hours before, he had been only an ordinary, every-day young clerk, thinking few thoughts outside the narrow ruts of business, baseball, and Louis Carr (back home from Indiana). To-day, what destiny of nations might not rest upon his shoulders? To-morrow, what would be the issue? Weal or wo?"

"Search *me!*" he panted, a trifle winded with the rapid gait he had struck. "Don't know, can't see. But by the great jumping jewsharp, I'm in this till the finish!"

Again he looked at his watch.

"Five-forty-seven," he noted. He had stayed with Haskins only five minutes. "I've got just thirteen minutes to locate a place I never saw, don't know the name of, and never even heard of till just now. Say, is this some stunting, or ain't it?"

And, breathless, he swung along as fast as he dared risk. To attract attention, at this particular time, he felt to be highly imprudent.

Now, were my story dealing with matters of less import, I might write a page or two concerning the desperate hunt for what Hasky had named "the little jerk Eye-talian place over on K street." But since, after all, that hunt consisted of only a quick walk down the street, with eyes peeled for a window containing typewriters, *plus* an Italian sign; and, secondly, since any such description would delay far other and more vital things, I pass it all with this brief summary, viz., that Darrow really did run it to earth at precisely three minutes after six.

His heart bounded as he caught the words in gilt letters:

P. BUCCAMANO & CO.,
Typewriters to Sell and Rent.
Maquine da Scrivere a Fittare ed a Vendere.

Across the street he dove.

Rattle! Rattle Rattle! went the locked door, under his hasty shaking.

"Too late?" he wondered, with unspeakable dread.

No, there at the rear, he could dimly see a figure moving. Then came a voice, surly, suspicious:

"All-a close' for-a business!"

Darrow's only answer was to rattle the catch more vigorously than ever. The proprietor, after a moment's silence, came forward heavily. A key turned. The door opened.

"Well, w'at-a you want?" demanded P. Buccamano & Co., compounded of fat and curls, a greasy mustache, an odor of garlic, and a general shirt-sleeve effect. From the rear room Darrow heard an infant's wail, then the tones of a woman soothing it with the "La-la-la-la!" which speaks a universal tongue.

"W'at-a you want, eh? No open for a biz, dis evening."

"Got any machines to let?" demanded Darrow, walking in. The best way to meet Buccamano's argument seemed to be to ignore it.

"Machine? Yes, but we not-a open for—"

"What kinds you got? What price per week, and month?" Already Darrow was inspecting the meager stock ranged on shelves constructed by the very simple means of setting packing-cases side by side and one on top of the other, with the open tops toward the shop.

"All-a kind, mista, but—"

"Got any Redmonds?"

"Da Red-o-monda? Yes, yes; t'ree, four. But—"

"How much a week?"

"Oh-a, sometime-a get dollar. Sometime-a—"

"How about seventy-five cents a week? Three dollars a month?"

"All-a right. You take-a one?"

"Let me look at 'em first," commanded Darrow. "All you've got. Every one. I've got a rush piece of work to do, and I can't use any other machine but the Redmond.

Mighty particular piece of work. Got to have a good machine. Let me look at 'em —all!"

Buccamano & Co., grumbling, struck a match and lighted a flaring jet. Though it was still daytime outside, yet through the dusty, musty pane seeped only a dim light.

As the jet blazed, and Buccamano started down the shop to bring a machine, the gray-suited man with the Panama slid into a doorway across the street.

The Italian deposited the Redmond in front of Darrow, on a rough bench covered with a disorder of paper and fly-specked stationer's supplies.

The machine, Darrow saw at a glance, was not the one on which the specimens in his pocket had been written, for the type was script instead of nonpareil. Nevertheless he picked up a sheet of yellow paper, slid it between the rollers and quickly delivered himself of the original and highly entertaining sentiment:

"Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party."

"Nope! Won't do!" he exclaimed in a tone of disappointment. "See this 'e' here, and this 'k'? Rotten! Bring another!"

The next one made his heart jump. One squint at the type-basket showed him the sought-for kind of letter. But disappointment followed close upon elation. For, having quickly written out a seemingly meaningless jumble of letters, containing, however, the well remembered fragments: "Di, Bet, Puu, Oa, Min, ua, Pea, ar. 12-27, 19, ill, a, Isla," his trained eye, long used to every minute point of typewriter lore, detected hopeless discrepancies between the alinement and spacing of the copy before him and the original in his pocket.

"Come on! Come on!" he exclaimed impatiently. "Let's have another!"

"W'at-a da matter-a you?" growled Buccamano & Co., eying his customer with irritation. "One-a machine just so good-a than de odders!"

"If you want to rent me a machine," answered Darrow, with asperity, "you show me the goods, *see?* If not, I take my money somewhere else and get the kind of a Redmond I want. Are you on?"

He made a move as though to rise. The Italian only grinned at him, ill-naturedly, and shook his head so hard that the brass earrings flailed.

"No, no, you not-a do it!" he retorted. "Not get-a Red-o-monda anywhere else-a da city! Cole *agenta,* me, Buccamano!"

And with a kind of primitive malice he whacked his adipose breast.

Darrow felt a stab of secret satisfaction. "By the Lord Harry," thought he, "I *am* on the track, all right, all right! Now if I could only just get the right machine, the rest would be lead pipe."

To the Italian he added in a more wheedling tone:

"Come, come, now; do me a favor, won't you? I'm a government employee, understand? In the stationery department of the pension office. You use me right, and maybe I can throw some biz your way—big money, what? Trot out all the Redmonds you've got, and let me look at 'em. Fact is," he rattled on, quick invention supplying him with copious falsehoods, "fact is, I'm a government typewriter inspector."

He turned back his lapel, and showed a nickel badge which, had the Italian examined it, he would have seen certified to all and sundry that bearer was (number 43,257, in the Foresight Accident Company; please notify home office, etc., etc."

The badge went. Buccamano grew respectful.

"Yes," continued Darrow, "I'm an inspector. If these machines look good to me, you never *can* tell what mightn't happen. Trot out the others."

Buccamano needed no second bidding. He hardly more than half believed his customer; yet, on the other hand, it might be true, after all. "Better be on the safe side," thought he, hauling down the remaining two machines of the desired make.

One of these machines Darrow saw at once, was not what he was after at all. Nevertheless he pounded off a classic sentiment about a "quick black fox" and pretended to scrutinize it carefully under the gaslight.

The other looked more promising, at first. Knowing full well the instinct of everybody when trying a machine, to write his own name, he whacked out "John J. Burley, 3016 N. St., N. W.," several times, then on another sheet tried the fragmentary words again. The former sheet, with the name, he left on the bench. In case of inquiry later, it might prove very useful in side-tracking investigators. As for the sheet with the cabala on it, he examined that with intense earnestness.

But though for a moment he believed, with fast-beating heart, that at last his search was ended, he was presently forced to admit, against his will, that certain fatal discrepancies showed themselves.

"Great Heavens, where *is* the right machine?" thought he to himself, despairingly. "Somewhere in this city it certainly must exist. If I could only find it—"

Up he looked at the proprietor.

"Here, I'll take this one," said he. "I'll try it a week, anyhow. Reserve it for me, will you?" And he laid a hand on the last machine.

"All-a right. You make-a da deposit now?"

"I'll pay you in advance. That's better. Send it up to my address, to-morrow forenoon sure!" He indicated the name he had written.

Slowly he counted out seventy-five cents into Buccamano's fat palm.

"Gee!" thought he, "that means I go mighty shy on lunches till pay-day. It comes high, this detective-story of mine, but I must have it!"

Then straight into the Italian's eyes he peered.

"You've got another of these machines?" asked he.

"One more, yes, meester. But it's no here-a. I rent-a heem, las' wik."

"Who's got it?"

Darrow's heart leaped madly as he fired this master-question at the greasy fellow. He tried to hold his voice steady; yet in spite of himself he felt it must be trembling. The Italian, now thoroughly suspicious, squinted at him with puckered eyes. Under the crude gas-flare, the young clerk could detect a glitter of dawning hostility in the black optics.

"Who—who's got it, please?" repeated he, suavely.

"W'at-a for you want-a know it?"

Darrow made a quick change of front.

"See here, you!" he exclaimed, pointing a lean forefinger right into the man's face, while his own eyes began to blaze behind the goggles. "I've had enough o' this! I'm not going to waste any more time chewing the rag with *you!* Two minutes I give you to tell me where that other machine is, or by thunder, I'll make it hot for you! Just 'round the corner, yonder," he jerked his thumb over his shoulder, "I've got two plain-clothes men waiting. Want 'em in here? In my pocket I've got a warrant!" This was perfectly true; only it was a warrant for payment of an oil-bill. "Want me to serve it on you? Now, come across!"

Buccamano started back. His yellow complexion became a pale olive. Darrow had taken a long chance; but the shaft had struck home. The Italian weakened instantly before the minatory gaze of the young clerk.

"All—all-a right, meester!" he exclaimed, spreading his hands, fingers wide and palms vertical, toward Darrow, in a gesture of repellence. "All-a right! You no call-a da cop! I—I tell-a you all—everyt'ing-a!"

"Quick!"

"Dis-a minute! Yes, yes! Right away!"

And, turning, he started to shuffle off toward the back of the shop.

"Wait-a one minnute! I getta da book!" said he.

"No, you don't!" shouted Darrow. "You don't get out o' my sight! No gun-play in this!" He reached back toward his own hip-pocket, where lay a small pocket-dictionary. "Come back, there! Come back! What name, now? What address?"

Buccamano halted. He began to sweat and tremble. Despite his avoirdupois, his heart was thimble-size.

"No shoot-a! No shoot!" he pleaded, secretly cursing the luck that his own gun was lying on a shelf in the back room. "I tell-a you, queeck! Yes, yes! I give-a you all you want-a!"

"Go on! Who's got it?"

"Globe Laundry—he got it! Las' wik, so help-a—" and he raised his hands on high.

"Globe Laundry? Where's that?"

"How *I* remember all-a address? So many da machine!"

"Where is it?" Again Darrow's hand crept back toward the dictionary.

"Two hundr' five, A, Nort' Twenty-Fourt' Street!" whined Buccamano. "But you no—"

"Thanks," said Darrow, cold as steel. "Now, that's all from you, see? The best thing you can do is to keep your mouth sewed right up tight! Zitto! Are you wise? Good night!"

And, taking good care not to turn his back toward the Italian, he retreated in good order from the dingy little shop.

The door slammed. Once more he stood in the street.

"Now for it!" he exclaimed.

CHAPTER V.

BAFFLED.

PLANS all unformulated, knowing neither what he should encounter nor how to meet it, yet driven forward by the hot tides of determination that now coursed through every fiber, the clerk laid his course westward for the address that the Italian had been forced to give him.

As he went—all unconscious of the surveillance of the man in gray, who still dogged his tracks—he tried to analyze the situation, size it up, and make some definite campaign of action; yet, try as he would, only one fact seemed to stand out clearly as a beacon-guide through the morass of difficulties. This: that he must, at all hazards, lay hands on the typewriter whereon the original message had been written. This: with that machine under observation, he might be able to determine who had written those words, and when, and why. How thin a spider's web of hope! Yet it was all he had. And to it with a bulldog grip he hung.

By a process of elimination he reasoned, as he strode along in the approaching twilight.

"It was certainly written on a Redmond. That's sure. The only Redmonds in this town are handled by that crafty dago. I've seen 'em all but one. I haven't found the one I want. Therefore—the one that's out now is the one I'm after!"

Yet, though according to all rules of logic this proposition worked to a satisfactory proof, it left him with an anxious dread, a doubt, a sinking uncertainty. What if, after all, it didn't turn out so? What if, to-morrow, he had no data for the secretary?

"Gad!" he murmured in alarm, quickening his pace, "that'll be *my* finish, all right, all right, more ways than one!"

Twenty minutes brought him to his destination; but now that he was near the place, his courage—till now adequate—began to ooze. He had had no supper, for one thing. The emptiness of his stomach reacted on his nerve. Dyspeptic always, he had little reserve force. He longed for the strength of a Hackenschmidt, to grapple with this problem, throw it, and hold it down. Half consciously he sneered at his own weakness, his sedentary ineptitude for the hard hand-grapple with virile strife.

"I am a dope, that's a fact!" thought he, as he turned off K into Twenty-Fourth Street, and with blinking eyes began to seek the house numbers. "Gee whiz! What a mutt I was to tackle a thing one hundred sizes too big for me!"

But he did not withdraw. No, something in the clamp of that thin lantern-jaw bespoke a will which could not retreat; which could only go on, on, on, till something broke.

"Two hundred and five, A," he repeated to himself, scanning the numbers. "That's an odd number. I'm on the same side. Guess I'd better cross over."

He did so, and continued down the street. Now he had reached 150—175—200.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. Across the street from him, its lights yellowing the sidewalk, he perceived the place.

"What? A Chink joint?" And he stopped in amazement. This contingency had not been thought of. The idea of any Chinaman hiring a typewriter was too bizarre to have occurred to him. Yet such was the case.

For, in big red letters on the glass, he read the words:

CHARLEY YUN LEE

and hanging from an iron rod at right angles to the building depended a red sign:

Globe Laundry

For a minute or two Darrow was at a loss. He had expected to find a regular American laundry, with an office into which, on a pretext of inspecting the gas mantles or something of that sort, he could gain access. Once there, he had counted on a quick wit and on circumstances to enable him to find out something about the machine. Maybe he might, in the first place, blunder right in and ask to see it—though, in view of the circumstances, this might prove unwise. At any rate, he had thought only of dealing with Americans. But now, facing the problem of tackling Chinamen, he felt a sudden chill. The astute, slant-eyed men he could not understand; they baffled him. In common with all white men, he felt the impossibility of ever getting beneath the yellow exterior, into the

psychology of the Oriental. So, horribly chagrined, he stopped a moment to consider.

Yet, even in his surprise and disappointment, he felt a thrill of exultation. For this circumstance certainly lent color to his theory. Now he began to see light.

"That India-ink mark on the back of my fragments—yes, it *was* a character of some sort or other!" thought he. "I'm on the trail, all right enough. Only, how the deuce am I going to follow it now?"

Vaguely, with nebulous outlines and vast, unknown proportions, he began to see something taking shape. What, he knew not; but the ghostly figure of some huge, sinister plot began to grow faintly visible. He wiped his forehead, where the sweat was pricking out, and drew a deep breath.

"Gosh!" he ejaculated.

Then, slowly, he walked past the laundry, on the other side of the street.

For a moment he had the idea of going over and entering. But what reason could he give? He had no soiled linen to leave, no washing to call for. At once he felt the impossibility of visiting that place without at least running the risk of arousing fatal suspicions.

"No," said he, strolling along, hands clasped behind him, head bowed in thought —"no, I've got to get at it some other way. My great Scott, what wouldn't I give to have an X-ray eye for just about ten minutes!"

At the next corner he crossed the street, then came back along the sidewalk that led directly past the laundry. Loitering, he drew near. His heart thumped disagreeably, and he noticed a shortage of breath as he came abreast of the Globe. But he kept on.

Now he was right in front of it.

In he peered, staring eagerly through those round, black-rimmed goggles of his.

"Bah!" thought he. "Nothing doing!"

For, after all his hopes, nothing could be seen—nothing of the slightest moment. The interior was absolutely innocent-appearing. In the window, bundles of washing. At one side of the shop, an ironing-table, before which a couple of blue-clad, pigtailed men industriously plied their irons. At the other, a stove, with more irons. On the walls, long red scrolls with sprawling characters; a gaudy print or two; a Chinese calendar. The shop was one of ten thousand, all alike.

Keenly disappointed, he passed on. All at once he felt very shaky, tired, lonesome, and helpless. He, a rather anemic young lighthouse establishment clerk, trying to run down an intangible clue with no slightest assistance; he, all alone, against the unknown—what hope?

And now plunged into the black abyss of despair, facing denunciation from his superior, discharge, loss of his only source of livelihood, he began to tremble with sickening apprehension.

Thus for the moment utterly overthrown, he blundered up the street in the evening gloom. A quick-lunch room attracted his attention, inviting him to rest and think. Into it he turned.

"Egg-sandwich and," he ordered, sitting on one of the high revolving stools. But when the stale egg, dripping grease from between the soggy rolls, and the strong, muddy coffee were slapped down on the shiny counter, he found no appetite, He could not force himself to take more than a single bite and drink half the anemic coffee. Dejectedly he paid, from a diminished purse. The cash-register rang, and once more he found himself out on the sidewalk, wound in a web of difficulties that ever an amateur detective encountered.

All at once he felt a strong imperative for solitude—for a chance to rest, to think, to puzzle out this thing apart from the jostling contact of humanity. His mind turned toward the new park down by the tidal reservoir along the banks of the Potomac. And thither, with a real relief, he now betook himself.

He found a bench not far from the water's edge. A certain peace descended on him, thus to leave the city behind, even though it was but a few hundred paces in the rear. The calm of evening soothed him. The slow, even current seemed as though it bore away the troubles and hot vexations of his spirit. In midstream the island loomed vaguely comforting. Over beyond Analostan a twinkling light or two betrayed the location of Rosslyn. Darrow's thoughts turned to the country, the grass and fields over on the Virginia shore, the dark outlines of the trees, half-glimpsed, and, above, the big and quiet stars.

Once more he seemed to see home, the old farm back in Mount Sterling, Indiana. Just so, from the big barn, he had once been used to look across the flood of the Ohio, at the lights of Warsaw, in the Blue Grass State.

"Say, I was the champ boob ever to leave it!" murmured he; and a mist formed upon his glasses. He blinked hard, gulped, and, burying his aching head in both hands, tried to think. All he could see was the face of Louise Carr.

Then, instantly, lightning seemed to strike him.

A sheaf of brilliant fires burst in his brain. He felt himself hurled from the bench to the gravel walk.

He tried to cry out; but iron hands were at his throat. A knee was on his chest, there in the gloom.

"Uh! *Uh!*" was all the sound he could bring forth, even with the most horrible exertion.

Vainly he tried to strike. His arms were pinioned. He heard panting breath.

Then he sensed a hard, quick hand ripping his coat open. Out it tore the billfold, after which came a foul curse, and once more a smashing blow cracked on his skull.

Still struggling, though but weakly now, he felt himself lifted.

Some one, enormously strong, was carrying him like a child.

"Uh! Wa! Wa-a-*ah!*" he groaned.

A heave, a swing!

Out through the air he whirled.

A deafening splash, a gurgling fight for breath, and then—

CHAPTER VI.

205-A TWENTY-FOURTH STREET.

SOMETIMES an inch more or less, a bit of mud, the fraction of a second, or the merest accident, changes the course of history.

Had James Macdonnel not blundered with the lock at the famous Hugomont gate, Waterloo might have had a different ending, and the tragedy of St. Helena might have never been.

Thus, now, in the career of James B. Darrow, and in the vital issues at present therewith connected, a half-rotten old plank altered the nation's record-scroll. Whence had it come, that plank? Far down the river, maybe, there to lodge against the mud, and wait, and idle, till all at once a human being—destined for one big human event—found himself clinging to its farther end with the grip of half-drowned desperation.

Without that plank at hand, Darrow's life would have ended in the Potomac, at that very place and moment. With it—but this story will presently inform you.

At first, able only to cling, to catch his gasping breath, he did no more than crawl a little up the bank, and lie there in the dark — muddy, drenched, and in a daze. But gradually he recovered some measure of sense and reason; slowly he pulled himself together, spat out the mud and water, looked about him, found himself still alive, and—save for an aching head and a blood-oozing cut on the scalp—comparatively intact.

Then, a few minutes later, having washed off the worst of the filth and blood, he dragged himself up the bank again, and so reached the path and the bench once more.

Vaguely seen, a few couples were strolling in the vicinity. On the next bench but one sat a youth and maiden; but they appeared oblivious. The city lights cast dim rays. Darrow thanked Heaven for the darkness. If anybody noticed him at all, it was no doubt only to mistake him for a harmless tramp.

Darrow noticed that his hat was gone. He felt around the bench. On the grass he found it. This gave him a grain of comfort. Nothing is more forlorn than your civilized man without a hat. The hat was dry, too; and that was something.

He put it on his wounded head, and felt a tiny flicker of hope revive. A great weariness oppressed him; but he dared not sit down again in the park, to think. His wet, clinging clothes, too, urged him to be moving. Even though his billfold was now gone, and with it the precious scraps of paper, apparently his only clue, he could not feel that everything was lost. Still, in his mind he bore the image of those disjointed words, those letters. So long as life remained in him, nobody could take *those* away!

"I guess," thought he, "the best thing I can do is hike along and think this out. It's check, all right, but not mate! Not mate, yet—by a long shot!"

Lamely, with aching head, he limped along. As he went, he raised a tremulous fist.

"Do I quit *now?*" quoth he. "I guess so—nix!"

The oblivious couple ceased for a second in their whispering of sweet nothings, to wonder dimly at this hobo person. But only for a second. Into the gloom Darrow vanished.

Suddenly a great longing seized him, wet and chilly and all but lost in the maze of ever-increasing difficulties.

"Gee! If I could only get a cigarette!" said he.

He felt in his pocket. Yes, there was a little loose change still left. Off to the left, half-glimpsed through the park trees, glimmered a brace of lights, red and green, like a liner head-on. Darrow bore a straight course for those beacons. The prospect of a drug-store was infinitely comforting.

With diffidence he approached. But, save for a mild stare, the drug clerk showed no very great concern. Drug clerks get used to everything. That a man should be wet and muddy cannot excite them.

"Took a nap down on the bank, there, and fell in," Darrow felt constrained to volunteer. "Say, I'll take a penny box of matches, too."

He lit up the cheap cigarette and felt better at once.

Two cigarettes set him thinking again. By the time he was ready to light the third, he felt reviving courage as he paced the park, waiting to dry off in the warm spring air.

"Quit, now?" he repeated, with something savage in his intonation. "When I'm on the track? When if—if I *don't* make good, I get the ax? Forget it!"

Vanished, now, the originally high patriotic motives which had at first inspired him to report his suspicions to the secretary. Vanished all altruism. In their place, a very human, personal fear of losing his job; anger at all the labor and abuse he had already endured as a result of his quest; a burning desire to get even with somebody, he knew not whom—to make good—to batter down, in spite of all his weakness, the vast powers which seemed to have been set in motion to crush him.

And, shaking his bony fist at the perfectly indifferent stars, he swore. Then, with the speed of light, an idea occurred to him. He could feel its sudden entrance from his subconscious into his objective mind, as though it had broken free from moorings and swung into the mental stream.

"Got it!" cried he, exultant. "Got it—if the luck turns!"

Waiting no longer, he once more set off in the direction of the Globe laundry. Forgotten, now, the fact that he was still wet and untidy, that hunger was assailing him, that his head ached madly with the clout he had received at the hands of some person unknown.

Forgotten his angry wonder as to that assailant and as to the manner wherein anybody could have learned that on his person he had borne those scraps of paper. Forgotten the chagrin of their loss. A new idea possessed him. And, strong in hope renewed, he strode along.

He kept to alleyways and small back streets. The avenues and larger streets he shunned, for there, among the bright lights, his drabbled wetness would surely attract attention, which was the one thing he must now at all hazards avoid.

Though he was by no means over-familiar with this part of the city, down along the river, yet he found no very serious difficulty in working his way, hobo-fashion, toward the desired spot. Night covers, even more than charity, a multitude of shortcomings.

On the way, he passed an open-fronted hardware-shop where, on benches, all manner of tools and ironware lay displayed in little boxes.

Here he stopped a minute. He counted out the last of his money. One dime, two nickels, seven pennies. By dint of haggling, he got a thirty-five-cent chisel, somewhat rusty, for these twenty-seven cents.

Absolutely broke, yet rich in expectations, he pocketed this bit of steel, and once more pushed along.

"Maybe this," thought he, "will answer questions even better than old Macaroni di Spagett, back there!"

Arriving again in the vicinity of the Globe, he paused. From the distance of a block away, he reconnoitered. Still shone the lights in the laundry window. Though the hour was now past ten, the Orientals were at work, he judged.

"So much the better," he assured himself, casually walking nearer. Yes, he could see both men toiling over their irons in the front room. "Good!" said Darrow.

He turned back, took J Street, and, arriving at the alley that ran parallel to Twenty-Fourth, entered it. Here, save for a rare gaslight, was welcome darkness. Silent and furtive, he slipped along. As he went, he scrutinized the backyard fences and gates, most of which were numbered to correspond with the buildings in front.

In less than five minutes he had located the back gate of the laundry. Even had

not the number, 205A, been painted there, he could have told the place; for, peeking through a knot-hole in the fence, he made out dim, ghostly lines of washing hanging in the yard.

"Here's where I get busy!" said Darrow to himself, pausing a moment to make sure no eye beheld him. A sudden sputter and yowl down the alley startled him almost out of his damp skin. Then he grinned with relief.

"Huh! Only a couple o' cats!"

Once more he turned to the gate. Cautiously he tried the latch. It did not yield.

"Locked," said he. "Come on, chisel, get busy!"

Quietly, yet strongly, he applied it. With a snap of broken cast iron, the gate swung inward. Darrow's long neck stretched as his owlish visage peered through the opening, this way, then that. The yard was deserted.

A moment later Darrow was inside, the gate shut after him; and, creeping down the brick walk between the rows of wind-swayed linen, he approached the back porch of 205A.

A lattice-work protected it on two sides. On the third, six steps led up. To the right, Darrow could vaguely distinguish two windows, tight-shuttered.

"What next?" wondered he, pausing at the foot of the steps. Now that he was actually on the field of action, nothing very definite occurred to him. To make a plan, at a distance, is a very different thing from executing it in detail.

"Hang it!" he thought, "I've got to do something, anyhow! Can't risk loafing 'round here for long, that's certain!" And, daring hardly to breathe, he turned from the walk and approached the nearer of the two windows.

"Too high," he judged, with disappointment. He could, in fact, just touch the sill with his raised hand. No chance of peeking in, even had the shutter been open.

About him he peered in the dark, straining his eyes for some means of climbing up.

"Ah! A box!" said he to himself, much relieved. Beside the porch stood an empty soap-box. He was just on the point of reclaiming this, when—what? There at the rear gate, a creak of hinges! A rattle of the broken latch!

Darrow realized that somebody was entering the yard!

A wild fear shot through him. To be detected spying there meant ruin, or a charge of attempted larceny, that much was certain. Assault, he might encounter; perhaps murder! He began to tremble violently. Down he crouched in the dark corner where the porch joined the house. He held his breath. The pounding of his heart seemed certain to betray him. There in an abject, cringing heap he obliterated himself.

None too soon, for already the unknown person was cautiously coming down the walk. Darrow could hear his breathing; the wheeze of it indicated a bulky individual. At the bottom of the steps the man paused an instant. Against the pallid dark of the sky, Darrow perceived a black blotch, which was the newcomer's head.

It moved. Footsteps sounded on wood. Then the porch-boards creaked.

Darrow, all ears, waited in a cold tremor of excitement.

. . *Tap-tap-tap! Tap-tap!* came a knocking. Three raps, then two. The signal was repeated. With a kind of desperate summing-up of the will, Darrow craned his neck. His eyes came to the level of the porch-floor. Through the lattice he, all unseen, found he could get a line of vision on the door. Yes, there stood a vague, black figure, motionless.

Tap-tap-tap! Tap-tap!

All at once came a little click. A slide had been opened in the door. A round, white beam of light spouted out upon the caller's face. Darrow knew a pocket electric flash-lamp was being directed through the hole.

Only an instant the light lasted; yet in that instant the young clerk got sight of a bristly, close-cropped yellow mustache and a beefy face surmounted by a Panama. Then darkness fell again, blacker than ever by contrast with the light.

A voice from within: "Got it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Any trouble?"

"No, sir. No fight in him. Weak! Harmless!"

"Where is he?"

"Safe. *I* fixed him."

"Good! Give it to me!"

Came a slight rustle of paper in the dark. Then the inner voice spoke again — and Darrow knew it was no foreign voice, either, but a straight-out American one—a voice familiar, despite its muffled dulness:

"Here's the cipher. He may have talked.

Cable this at once. To-night! Immediately! Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Here!"

Another sound of paper.

"Why didn't you come sooner?"

"Went up to the other place. Thought you'd be there, sir."

"Of course. I ought to be, now. Hold on; I'll go with you now!"

Click! The slide was closed.

Darrow held his breath till he thought he must burst. At last, having either to breathe or die, he took a little air through wide-open lips, soundlessly.

The wait seemed an hour. Really it was but five minutes. Then a key grated and the door swung open. Another dark figure joined the other, which all this time had stood there motionless.

"They'll work late in the front room to-night," whispered the man who had come out — seemingly a tall, square-shouldered person. "Everything's ready, except just to give the word. You cable, while I go— you know!"

"Yes, sir!"

No further speech passed between them. Together they went down the steps and along the bricks to the gate. There they paused a moment. Though Darrow could now no longer see even the dimmest shadow of them, he sensed that this momentary delay was for the purpose of reconnoissance before venturing into the alley.

A voice from the gate, a voice he could have sworn he recognized: "What's the matter with this catch?"

"Anything? *I* don't know, sir."

"I'll have to get after Katsu about such carelessness. It's broken!"

"No matter. After to-night—well—"

The gate closed after the two men. Silence fell. But for a long time Darrow still crouched in obscurity. Who could tell? They might be coming back!

If he thought of it once, he did a hundred times, the lure of safe retreat while yet he was alive and sound. His head ached brutally, now that the first flush of excitement had passed. It was gummed and sticky with dried blood. Warm though the night was, a chill was in his bones. His damp clothing clung about him in soggy and depressing heaviness. And, more than all, the colloquy he had overheard filled him with shrinking, sinister apprehensions.

"Cipher! Cable?" thought he. "To-night! All over but that? My Heaven! What am I up against!"

Almost on the point of creeping toward the gate in retreat was he. But, as he stirred, he felt the chisel in his pocket. And, like a powder-train, the sequence of determinations flared up in him again.

"Quit? Without even a look-in? After all I've been through? Huh!"

And now with most minute caution, yet filled once more with revivified pluck, he reached for the soap-box again. Under the window he placed it, making sure by jiggling it steady with his hands that it was firmly planted.

Upon it he mounted.

Noiselessly he applied one of his goggled eyes to a thin crack between the blinds.

"What?" he gasped, astonished despite himself into a whispered voicing of his surprise.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIGHT IN THE BACK ROOM.

THE room into which he now found himself peering was lighted by a Welsbach. This in itself might have seemed strange for the rear room of a Chinese laundry; but stranger still were the other appointments.

For instead of tubs, clothes-horses, shelves full of washing-powder, and a stove, Darrow beheld a comfortably furnished apartment with a revolving book-case, a Morris chair, and other chairs well upholstered, a smoking-table whereon lay débris of cigars, and—most important of all—a broad desk with a typewriter.

Unable to believe his senses, Darrow for a moment felt that he must be in error. Perhaps, after all, this room was not a part of the laundry. Perhaps it belonged to the adjoining house. Darrow visualized this possibility very distinctly; so distinctly that already a sense of huge disappointment was beginning to steal over him, when it was instantly dispelled by the sight, there on the wall, of a red, character-covered scroll.

On the table, too, he now observed a carven ivory netsuke. And, lying open on the desk, with a paper-knife across its leaves to hold it in position, a book such as never was made on this side of the Pacific.

Then, eagerly realizing that now his search was almost at an end, he scrutinized the typewriter.

"A Redmond, for sure!" exulted he. "*The* Redmond! The very identical one, so help me, that wrote the message I'm after!"

And, giving a great leap, his heart began to thrash with the excitement of a chase all but completed, with the foreknowledge that, in the next few minutes, destiny was making, life and death were being weighed, the balances of fate about to tip!

Yet now, even though his goal was in plain sight, the young chap knew not how to proceed. It is one thing to contemplate, from a safe distance, breaking into a conspirators' den with the aid of a chisel; another thing to execute that coup.

How could he tell what situation might face him there? How know the number of plotters in the house, masked by the laundry in front? How hope anything but this—that at the first suspicious sound that door across the room would burst open and death leap on him in the guise of steel or lead?

"G-g-gosh!" chattered Darrow weakly in the face of such contingencies. "If I —if I had a machine-gun, or something, or a—a squad of cops—maybe I might butt in there. But this way! Plain suicide."

Why not retreat now, lay the case on the desk of the nearest police station, and let authority run the game to bay? Surely he had followed the spoor far enough! What could be gained now by crawling into the very lair of the beast? But even before he had thought it out in logical sequence Darrow knew it was to be that way or no way at all.

To report this thing, to stir up city-wide, nation-wide excitement, maybe, and then after all to run the risk that nothing would develop, nothing be found, would inevitably ruin him.

Then, too, he feared lest, by giving his secret to others, the prey might escape him, the plot go through to its infernal success. Now that this very night was destined for the crisis, now that every minute perhaps might be vital, he dared not leave his vantage-post.

"No, no!" thought he. "Lone hand! Whole game or nothing this deal."

Then, before he rightly realized what he was doing, he had the chisel in hand once more, and with trembling yet steel-strong hands was prying at the catch. It strained, creaked, then, with a sharp *ting* burst in halves. Darrow, breathing hard, waited in the thick dark, standing on the soap-box.

A moment thus he remained there, every nerve atingle, listening, peering for his very life. Nothing! He seemed to have excited no suspicion in the other occupants of the house. A hissing sputter and yowl betrayed the presence of feline combatants again on the alley fence. From the street corner, half a block up, jangled a trolley-gong. The even hum of the city's life, dull, monotonous, far, droned on and on. Yet to Darrow it seemed that he alone of all those thousands was really living—really infused with the inner, vital knowledge of the overshadowing tragedy about to consummate itself.

"The window, now!" thought he. And, noiselessly opening one of the shutters, he thrust his chisel under the lower sash.

Now very great grew his risk of detection. For the light inside, streaming out, bathed him in a soft, white radiance. Instantly he realized that, standing thus, it would be ten chances to one somebody would very soon discover him and raise an outcry.

"In I go now," he grunted, "or it's all off."

He threw his full strength on the chisel.

Snap!

He almost fell off the box with the recoil of the breaking blade. In burning haste he jerked the broken half of the chisel out from under the sash and jammed in the stouter part, next the handle.

Again he pried. This time something gave above. The window rose half an inch.

Frenzied, he hung his weight upon the handle. With a jangle of wrecked metal, the window yielded. Next moment Darrow had raised it, and, flinging a leg over the sill, had clambered into the mysterious chamber.

Like an instantaneous photograph the topography of the room printed itself upon his fevered brain. Here the table, there the typewriter, yonder the single door leading into the front part of the house—into the "laundry."

With quick sagacity, he tiptoed, panting, to that door. A second, and the key was turned, the door securely locked.

"That'll hold 'em a few seconds, anyhow," grunted Darrow.

He wheeled, and, with a single gesture, turned off the gas.

"No rubbering from *out*side, now!"

Then he turned to the typewriter-desk. Even though the quick transition from light to dark practically blinded him, he knew

just where to lay hands on that all-precious thing.

"Give me one minute, now, and I'll have it out o' here and away!" he exulted, his heart thrashing so it nearly choked him.

But even as he laid hands on it came a running of soft-shod feet in a hallway beyond the door. Then cries burst forth—two voices sounded, chattering unintelligibly yet with accents of wild fear.

And, hurling themselves against the panels, clattering the knob, then pounding again in frenzy, Darrow heard the laundrymen fighting savagely for admission.

"Stand back!" he roared. "The first man through that door I'll blow his yellow head off!" This, though his only weapon was a broken, blunted fragment of a thirty-five-cent chisel.

A moment's pause. Darrow seized the typewriter. Then along the bottom of the door a bright streak appeared in the dark. They had made a light. And, almost instantly, with a thunderous crash, some heavy thing shivered against the panels near the lock.

Toward the window Darrow started with the machine. But he had not made two steps when—smash went the door again.

Darrow saw a jagged, uneven spangle of light appear in the panel.

Snarling, high-pitched cries rose from the hall. Then through the splintered hole catapulted a flat-iron. And right after it a long, thin, saffron-yellow arm was thrust. The corded hand, clawlike and lean, twisted up, around, grasping for the key on the inside of the door.

"Here, you, stop that!" screamed Darrow in a frenzy of sudden rage—red rage, so wild that it banished fear and waked the till-then-unknown killing lust in him. "Cut that out, you murderous Chinks!"

Down he flung the typewriter onto the table. Out he flashed his chisel; and, like a tiger flinging himself upon that hand, struck at it with a madman's strength.

Rose a horrid, wild-pitched shriek in the hallway. The arm and hand jerked back. And Darrow, still clutching the chisel, ran once more for the machine.

But now the sounds of an ax at work on the lock outside gave unmistakable warning that scant time remained.

"They'll get me sure!" thought Darrow. "Sure as shootin', if I try to lug it off! How far ahead of 'em could *I* keep, with a fifty-pound handicap?"

Something else would have to be done. Some other method thought of to tear from that piece of mechanism its secret! Some other way beside stealing it and running. But what? How?

For, smashing against the lock, the heavy, shattering blows resounded.

Howls and imprecations in a strange tongue filled the hallway. Darrow cringed an instant, his hawk-face pale as milk, eyes blazing, mouth agape.

Then, with a cry, "By gad! Got it!" his brain riven with inspiration, he snatched at the ribbon of the machine.

Years of work with typewriters had taught him more than mere accuracy and speed.

"This! This! Got to have it!" he panted.

Both hands grabbing, he hauled the ribbon out in great, yard-long loops and coils. The ribbon-spools spun round like mad. Their tiny ratches buzzed.

"Quick! The ribbon!"

With a last desperate jerk he ripped it away. One of the spools flew jingling to the floor.

But now, as in exultation he crammed the long blue tape into a mass and shoved it into a pocket, the door burst inward.

By the light in the hall he saw two savage, snarling, pig-tailed men in flapping denin, cascade through the wreckage.

Up whirled the arm of one as Darrow turned to leap through the window. The ax swirled, gyrating wildly through the air.

Darrow crouched.

Crash! The glass was gone. All over and about him rained down splinters of it.

Then, shouting something incoherent, the young clerk jumped and straddled the sill. But before he could leap down yellow hands were clutching at his shoulder, grappling for his throat. A chair banged over in the room.

Full into a snarling face he drove his fist, laying his knuckles open against teeth.

A grunt. A swaying, tugging, straining wrench. Darrow felt his coat rip. Blindly he grappled. His fingers closed on something—a heavy braid of hair.

He caught a glint of a razorlike blade.

Then he plunged out in a half leap.

Down he crashed through the flimsy soap-box. He arose, staggered, half fell, then straightened, and broke into a dazed run for the gate.

A door jerked open. Thudded some heavy body on the earth behind him. Like a shot Darrow bounded down the walk.

An instant later he was racing along the alley toward the bright lights on J Street. Only when he reached the corner did he slacken to glance round.

Nothing.

"They've quit!" he gasped. "Gee! What's this I've got?"

He stood there, staring at a long pendulous object in his hand—a thing which until that instant he knew not that he had.

"Holy cats! A pigtail? What the—" A pigtail it certainly was, with a false scalp affixed thereto.

"What? Not Chinks at all? Why—why then—Japs?"

And Darrow, his brain reeling with the horror, the reaction of the past few minutes, the unspeakable astonishment of this discovery, leaned weakly up against the alley fence, shaken all over, sick, broken. He had just sense enough left to cram the pigtail into his breast-pocket. Then everything whirled round.

He knew that he was fainting.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRAIL ENDS.

HE revived, to find himself lying in the mud, a little knot of curious, sympathetic, half-suspicious persons, black and white, surrounding him. Instantly he understood the prime importance of creating no scene and of forestalling any police interference. So, struggling weakly to a sitting posture, he managed to articulate:

"All—all right now. Fits. Go home all right. No, not drunk. Epilepsy—that's all."

So they helped him to his feet and brushed him off; and somebody gave him a good nip from a pocket-flask; and thus, in a very few minutes, he was headed for home.

All the way out to Brightwood he stayed on the front platform of the electric, thus escaping the scrutiny of even the few late suburbanites. Unseen, shockingly disreputable, bruised, torn, and filthy, he let himself into Mrs. Sagg's third-rate boarding-house. And so once more, close to midnight, he regained his room.

Being by nature methodical, the first thing he did was to strip and take a good, warm bath. Then he washed and bandaged his scalp wound, got into pajamas and dressing-gown, polished up his goggles, flung the ruck of dirty clothes into a closet — after having first hauled out the typewriter-ribbon and laid it on his table —and lighted his student-lamp.

"Now," he said at last, getting down his tripod microscope from the shelf — "now, here's where I grow busy!"

In a fresh, well-inked ribbon the metal types as they strike leave an impression which sometimes you can make out with the naked eye. Under the microscope it becomes quite clear.

Even when a ribbon has been written two or three times over, something of the last impression can be read. The great difficulty is this: that the ribbon moves very slowly, and that therefore the letters are crowded uneven and irregular, overlapping one another and forming the most puzzling combinations.

None the less, with patience, good eyesight, and a fair lens, plus the right ingredient of luck and quick-witted imagination to fill gaps, you can really read a ribbon. Try it yourself some time, when you have a whole long night to spare, and see.

Darrow had the night, the time, the patience, and all the other requisites. Also, the ribbon had been written over only once, for more than three-quarters of its length. As he pored over it, moving it by sixteenths of inches under his microscope, he made notes.

Here, there, he jotted down a letter on a pad beside him. His breathing came irregularly. On his thin cheeks the spots of color glowed. Yet hour by hour he toiled, pausing only from time to time for a few whiffs of tobacco, a few turns up and down the dingy room.

Thus all night long he labored; and dawn found him spent and fevered, weak, and with an aching head, a body bruised, yet a mind keenly exultant, a soul thrilled with the poignant joys of victory.

"Made good, have I?" he spoke at last in a kind of tremulous whisper, flinging down his pencil. "Well, *some!*"

To the very butt he smoked his last cigarette. When it was gone, he sat a moment in deep meditation. Then he whistled softly.

"Gee!" he exclaimed.

Page after page of elaborately detailed

report he wrote. He read it over, corrected it, signed it "John Doe," and sealed it carefully in a big envelope which he directed to the President of the United States, with "*urgent*" underscored in the lower left-hand corner. Ten minutes later he had mailed this in the box at the adjacent corner, first collection 6 A.M.

Then he went back, locked his door, set the catch on his alarm-clock so that it could not by any possibility go off, and turned in.

At quarter to eight a rapping on his door awakened him.

"Come in!"

Entered a large gentleman, very pale, with glasses, and with an unnecessary muffler high about his mouth. He closed the door with care.

"Good morning, sir," said Darrow. "Please excuse my not getting up. I was out late last night on the case you set me at. It's good of you to have come, sir, but you needn't have. I was going to report just as soon as I could get pulled together. Fierce headache I've got. You gave me twenty-four hours, you remember?"

"Darn you!" he croaked. "I could shoot you dead, there, where you sit and mock me!"

"Oh, no, you couldn't, sir," replied Darrow sweetly, "because, you see, I've got you covered now, right under the sheet. Just start to pull that right hand out of that pocket, and I plunk you, sure. Through the abdomen, sir; it's a lingering death, they say, and very painful. Now, please, what do you want of me?"

"You scum! You've proved nothing!"

"So? How about the Diagram of Mines planted March 12-27, between Kapua Entrance and Pearl River, Island of Oahu? How about the laundry? Who's Katsu? Why did a man about your size give orders last night at ten-thirty to cable the cipher. How about—"

"Stop! Stop!"

"Chinamen with fake queues? And—"

"Wait a minute!" The man's voice grew savage in its fear. "Wait! What's your price?"

"My—how's *that?*"

"Your figure! It just comes to this: do you prefer to press this thing, prove nothing after all, and be broken—utterly ruined, or call a halt now, and—"

"Sell out, you mean?"

"Name your own figure!" whispered the man, coming close to the bed. "Name it! You'll get it, blast you, every penny!"

"Please get back a little—so, that's right," directed Darrow. Under the sheet his hand moved, as he kept the muzzle of the automatic trained on his caller. "No, I'm sorry, but there's nothing doing. Your whole biz has gone to smash. Burke's cleared. It's all off. Too late. That ribbon did it," and he nodded at the table, where still lay the coils of blue.

"You mean—"

"I mailed a full report to the President this morning at five-thirty. Naming names, too. In a little while now you'll be *it!* Are you on?"

"*What?*" gasped the man. "Oh, merciful Heaven! Then—then—"

His voice tailed off into a husky squeak. He swayed and took a step to keep from falling.

"Yes, I guess that's about right," judged Darrow coldly. "There's just about one answer. They say hydrocyanic acid gas is the easiest way. Quickest—only takes a second. Now, please go away. I'm sleepy. Good-by."

Like a somnambulist the man staggered out. Darrow listened for the street door to close.

Then he went out in the hall.

"Mrs. Sagg!" he hailed. "Oh, Mrs. Sagg!"

"Yes, sir?" came a voice from below.

"If you let anybody else disturb me today, on any pretext whatever, I'll leave! I want to sleep. I'm going to! *Understand?*"

He went back, bolted his door, washed down another headache-powder with a glass of water, and, pulling the bedclothes up about his ears, snuggled down for a long sleep.

He yawned, stretched, and turned over.

After a pause: "I've jolted Uncle Sam good and plenty. I've wised him O. K. The rest's up to him. *I'm* done!"

Another pause; then two disconnected thoughts: "Wish't I could apologize to old Burke, but I can't. And—wish't I knew what Louise would think. Louise—"

A minute later, indifferent alike to wars and rumors of wars, secrets of state, high treason, and sudden death, James B. Darrow, oil-checker, Class 2B and highly obscure, was snoring with vigorous cadences.

(The end.)

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